IMAGES OF AFRICAN SISTERHOOD:
Initiation and Rites of Passage to Womanhood

by

Nsenga Warfield-Coppock

Other Books or Resources by This Author

Transformation: A rites of passage manual for African American girls. With Moore, M., Gilyard, G., King McCreary, K. (1987) New York: STARS Press.

Afrocentric theory and applications, Volume 1: Adolescent rites of passage. (1990) Washington, D.C.: Baobab Associates, Inc.

The rites of passage movement: A resurgence of African-Centered practices for socializing African American youth. The Journal of Negro Education, 61 (4), Fall, 1992.

Afrocentric theory and applications, Volume 2: Advances in the Adolescent rites of passage. With B.A. Coppock (1992). Washington, D.C.: Baobab Associates.

Teen-age pregnancy prevention: A rites of passage resource manual. With A. Harvey (1989) Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ.

The rites of passage: Extending education into the African-American community. In M. J. Shujaa (Ed.), Too much schooling, Too little education: A paradox of Black life in white societies. (1994). Trenton, N.J.: African World Press.

Female Socialization: The rites of passage. In L. Rodgers-Rose (Ed.) The Black Woman. Revision in Press. Sage Publications.

Approaches to Resiliency: An African-Centered Perspective. Proceedings of conference entitled,"Fostering Spiritual Growth Among At-Risk Youth: Multi-Cultural Perspectives," Department of Religious Education, Boys Town, Nebraska, February, 1993.

To Sis Nonzamo
May the ancestors
continue to bless you
and your family
Peace & Love
Sis Nsenga
8/28/98

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Initiation and Rites of Passage to Womanhood

by

Nsenga Warfield-Coppock

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International Black Women's Congress

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Foreword

When You Re-educate a Woman, You Rescue a Nation

From the dawn of human history, one of the earliest social institutions has been African rites of passage. From all indications, Africans had rites of passage that pre-date Kemet (Egypt). We are aware of the rites of passage of young boys in Kemet. On the ancient carvings and paintings, we see young boys before going through the rites ceremony with the head clean shaven except for one lock of hair on one side, indicating that the boy has not yet gone through his manhood training. Both boys and girls participated in training for adulthood.

Our ancestors knew the importance of raising knowledgeable children who treated people right and lived by the principle of Maat. A just society can only exist if children are trained to do justice. Our ancestors knew that children grow up to become adults, who become mothers and fathers. They knew that the socialization of children could not be left to chance.

When young girls and boys reach a certain age, about eleven or twelve, they are separated from everyday activities of the society. A selective group of women, who are well versed in the values, ideas and beliefs of the culture, will take the girls and a similar group of men will take the boys away from the families for periods of one to three years. It is at that time that girls learn what it means to be a woman. They learn about how one becomes a mother; what mothers must do for their children; how to be a wife; how to handle relationships; why it is important to respect the elders; and what is appropriate behavior for a woman. Most importantly, they learn about themselves and the vital role that other women play in their lives. It is said that the most important relationship that African women establish is the relationship with the sisters and particularly those sisters that are a part of the same rites of passage circle. It is those women who know you best. They have shared your most intimate thoughts and helped you through seen and unseen dangers. Thus, we have the true essence of African womanhood and sisterhood in the proverb, **"When your sister is your hairdresser, you need no mirror."**

Although subjected to the holocaust of enslavement, our ancestors had the compulsion to continue rites of passage training. They reconstructed it in the swamp land of Florida, in the tobacco fields of North Carolina, in the rice paddies of South Carolina, among the sugar cane in Cuba, and in the rain forest of Brazil. As we stand on the verge of a new millennium, Nsenga Warfield-Coppock has produced a work to ensure the perpetuation of this sacred ritual.

Warfield-Coppock tells us that adult women must be trained. So many women never had a rites of passage as they moved from childhood into adulthood. They were never taught the sacred and cultural history of their people. Over a period of the past forty years we lost our separate cohesive communities--lost our schools, hospitals, banks, insurance companies, other businesses, and our homes. With the Black mass migration of the 20th century, millions of acres of African American farmland was abandoned in the South. Relatives never went back to pay the taxes on the property.

Many Black women today never grew up in communities where everyone knew them and their families and made sure that children behaved in appropriate ways--communities that functioned on the African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." Many Black women, who grew up in the North, did not spend their summers in the South with grandparents or older aunts and

uncles as a great deal of other women did prior to 1960. They did not experience the African American culture of the South. They were not raised with grandmothers who believed so much in the proverb, "Cleanliness is next to godliness," that they would sweep the dirt in the yard. Not being around the elders, they do not know the sacredness of the elders nor the power of the ancestors. When we no longer call the ancestors' names, they die, and we as a people die.

Nsenga Warfield-Coppock has given us a book that will help us get back to ourselves, get back to our ancestors. She says, "Ancestral wisdom unraveled, revived and resurrected will promote the reclamation and reascension of our people. Developing sisterhood circles and women's collectives are crucial keys to this resurrection." She has given us the materials we need to develop our own adult rites of passage circles. She has supplied us with the process and showed us how to organize support circles. Black women will not be able to train those young girls coming behind us if we have not had our own rites of passage training. We thank her for all the work she has done on rites of passage for girls of African ancestry, and now we thank her for the first ever book on rites of passage training for adult women of African ancestry. We thank her for making it possible for us to Sankofa--to go back and fetch that which we left behind.

Ashe! Ashe!

La Francis Rodgers-Rose, Ph.D.
President and Founder
International Black Women's Congress
Newark, New Jersey

SANKOFA: REACHING BACK TO GO FORWARD SUCCESSFULLY

Introduction

"When you educate a female you educate a nation"

If you are a woman of African descent, born in America, and over 25 years of age, you probabl missed a formal rite of passage to womanhood. It is not too late. This text is an opportunity t learn some of the basics of what is expected and provided in the initiation process. Furthermor one can use the information in this text to structure rites of passage for women and for thos younger than ourselves. You may ask--Why bother to do a rite for yourself? We submit tha womanhood is a sacred ideal for a people who understand that the survival of their people i brought through the women of their nation. We must first personally ascend if we expect to carr out the mission of raising the next generations and provide them with the sacred knowledge of ou ancestors. This is our sacred responsibility.

There are over 2 million African American adolescent girls in the United States. Twenty percen of our daughters drop out of high school before receiving their high school diploma. One in fou of our daughters who start college do not complete their four year degree. Many quit high schoo or college due to unplanned pregnancies. Our daughters are more likely to die in childbirth, lose their babies, be victims of rape, robbery, assault or murder than their counterparts in this country or in many foreign nations where standards of living are much lower. The number one cause of death of our teenage girls is homicide, except in New York City and Newark, where it is AIDS. Our daughters are the most likely to die at the hands of someone who has cared for them in the past. More than 50% of the juveniles now incarcerated are African American females. The mental and spiritual health of our daughters is at an all time low with twice the depression, anxiety and suicide of 10 years ago. Our girls are most afraid for their lives and those of their family and friends. Our daughters earn the lowest median wages of any group, yet many are raising a new generation of children, many in female headed single households.

Our daughters need us now. We must stop the death and destruction of our children and grandchildren. Individually and collectively we can make a difference in the lives of our girls by providing them with the best possible transition to womanhood -- their second rite of passage. All other peoples of the world give their offspring a world view that is consistent with their group's survival. All other peoples of the world train their children to carry on the traditions, customs, beliefs of their family and community. All other peoples of the world fiercely protect and unconditionally love their offspring. We, as African Americans, must at least be able to do the same for our daughters and our sons. Initiation and the rites of passage are our traditional methods to maintain our values and socialize our young people. We must help our girls become positive African American women keeping in our minds and hearts the following definition and goal:

An African Woman

*holds dear her family and community values (above those of the individual)
*knows and understands her place in the family history and history of African people
*strives to maintain our mission as guardian of our community's values
*transcends the male-oriented and eurocentric values and traps
*carries herself with integrity, humility, discipline, compassion and spiritual love
*strives for maximal development of whatever talents, potentials and capabilities she has in the interest of self, group and communal advancement
*supports and facilitates personal achievement in others
*accepts the challenge of personal courage
*accepts responsibility for her mistakes and forgives others for theirs
*trusts, respects and cherishes the elder's and her own feminine values and wisdom
*develop herself spiritually and recognizes her spiritual mate
*prepares herself to bring forth children who will be the carriers of generational truths and achieve cultural sovereignty
*recognizes the importance of her sisters in her life

*views children as the precious and irreplaceable gifts they are, according them rights, discipline, love, support, nurturing, guidance, protection and encouragement, for their full/complete development
*seeks to become a helpmate to African men in general and to her mate in particular
*accepts the continuous challenge and essential task of womanhood to heal cure/love ourselves and our people
*develop an individual and unique identity which is both separate and similar to her group
*exhibits and models the essence of the feminine nature showing unconditional love for her family, her sisters and her people.

My own personal experience of initiation into a society of African women has been so powerful and beneficial that I wish to share it with all my sisters. So I offer this small contribution in text form as a primer for the reclamation, restoration and respiritualizing people of African descent. In the following poem Brother Kalamu ya Salaam (1982) makes a contemporary restatement of the traditional African proverb (above) on the importance of women.

OUR WOMEN KEEP OUR SKIES FROM FALLING

our women keep our
skies from falling
our days from dying
our nights from crying

carrying deep
within themselves
the sacred sun loves
of African-american lives

embers which fire
black generations are
securely embedded betwixt
broad baobabian hips
and gleam sparkling forth
from deep lakes of
blue/black brown
dark ebony eyes

their song is
healing song, and
calling song, and
culture song, and
though no one can
stop the rain

our women keep our
skies from falling

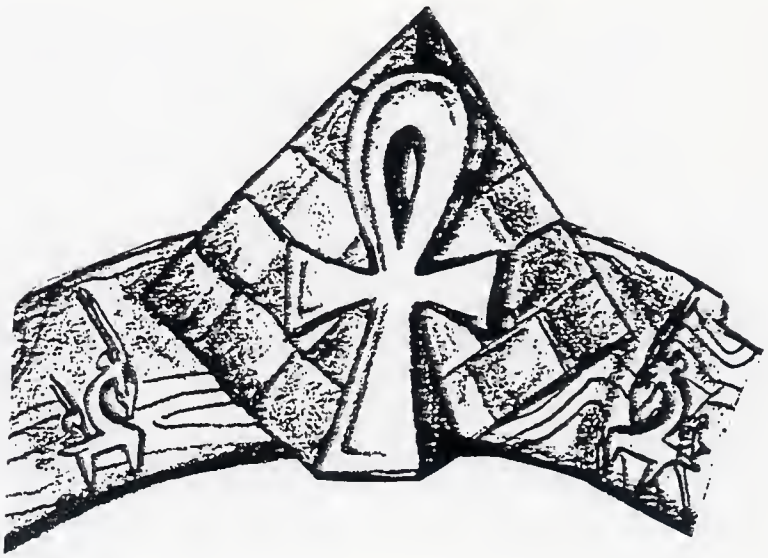
Let us meet the challenge of preparing ourselves as interested women, inspiring our daughters, then collectively reclaim our inviolable position in our families, communities and the world.

Medasi
July 10, 1994
Nsenga Warfield-Coppock

* Sowo, a water deity and goddess, the classical Sande Society (the women's secret society found largely in Sierra Leone) mask. The only mask worn by African women is the model of beauty and nobility.

Chapter 1
Womanhood Collectives and Sisterhood

Sisterhood and Women's Collectives
The Global Mission: Initiation of Warrior-Healers
Personal Strengths, Passages and Challenges
Group Strengths and Challenges
Ritual, Ceremony, Initiation and Sisterhood
Resources



SYMBOLS: THE PYRAMID AND THE ANKH.
The pyramid symbolizes the most ancient of societies -- Kemet (Egypt), where the transition to the spiritual world was a part of life.
The ankh, the ancient Kemet symbol of life.
These symbols together are representative of African people's unique spiritual life.

Initiation, or "becoming more God-like," has its origins in the complex ancient Mystery Systems established for the priests of Kemet.

Chapter 1
Womanhood Collectives and Sisterhood

"The woman who uses her sister as her hairdresser, needs no mirror"

Chapter Goals

1. Increase our knowledge and understanding of the purpose and need for initiation, sisterhood and womanhood collectives among females of African descent.
2. Identify the causes and cures of African peoples' global mission and how it relates to the development of initiated warrior-healers.
3. Identify our personal strengths, life passages and our challenges.
4. Identify our group strengths, our challenges and goals as African women.
5. Increase our knowledge and skills in the use of rituals and ceremonies for initiation preparation and the strengthening of sisterhood bonds.

Introduction

Ancestral wisdom unraveled, retraced, revived, and resurrected will promote the reclamation and reascension of our people. Developing sisterhood circles and women's collectives is a crucial key this resurrection. As African descent women we should seek initiation into sisterhood circles that will keep us stable and on the path through our adult and elder years. We must reinstitute our traditional networks and support systems to reclaim and restore African principles and values. African women's knowledge and strength, traditionally, came through her relationships with her female peers and the secret society of women.

According to anthropologist Hsu (1970) all ethnic groups have a primary (or preferred) kinship relationship. Lineage, economics and even political leadership seems to emerge from this key affiliation. For people of European descent the primary relationship is the husband-wife with patrilineal, a nuclear kinship pattern, and President/First Lady political model. For Asian people the primary relationship is father-son, patrilineal, extended family with power passing from father to son. The people of Indian/Moslem ancestry value the mother-son relationship. A prime example was the political leadership that passed from Indira Ghandi to her son.

Among Africans the gender-peer relationship is primary and the most enduring alliance throughout the person's life time. Males and females are initiated with their gender peers by their gender elders. Therefore, the gender collectives and peer circles are the basis of our identity and association with the outside world. For persons of African descent, brotherhoods and sisterhoods are from whence our power, strength and support both emanate and are sustained. Sisterhood is the most important of African women's relationships. The secret societies or collectives are the dwelling of women. We enter them as girls and emerge from them as women. They are where we turn or return when in need of solace, reaffirmation and comfort.

All the peoples of the globe have world views, beliefs, customs and traditional behaviors which are typically adopted within the society's parameters. As Europeans travelled the world they have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to replace, influence or change the values of the indigenous people with their own values, religions and customs which they considered superior. African's traditional kinship structure, the unity of gender peers, have supported the infrastructure of extended families, communities and the people as a whole. However, many Africans, on the continent and abroad have embraced beliefs and values of their colonizer or oppressor. Som`e

(1994) suggests that if our knowledge of the West and its values causes us to forget our own knowledge then we must abandon the ways and knowledge of the West. This accommodationist practice has continued the internal dis-unity or dis-ease. Ancestral insight into tradition, it is decreed, shall be a choice one makes at the time of preparation for initiation. This chapter is designed to assist in the personal and group reconnection process needed to begin our people's mission of ascension and liberty.

Sisterhood and Women's Collectives

The major design to this book and specifically of this chapter will be outlined here to provide a clear picture of the journey we are suggesting to meet the stated plan of personal, group and youth development and ascension of African people.

Personal Growth and Development

All growth and development begins with the individual. The danger of this focus is that it can become an end in itself and one never moves to the collective level. For the eurocentrically-oriented person the life-long focus on individualism is sufficient for one who stays in the European individualistic society or community. Development for Africans requires the balance of personal and group betterment. In any event personal growth can begin with the following activities:

* Reading relevant materials
* Meditation and prayer
* Keeping a journal of your journey
* Writing
* Self assessment, reflection and introspection
* Planning one's path with the skills, education and training that will be needed

Group Development combined with Personal Growth

Personal Growth:

* Sisterhood process
* Bonding in age-peer groups
* Exploring womanhood issues
* Create rituals/ceremonies

Balanced with Advancing the Collective:

* Convening a group of like-minded sisters/core organizing group
* Organizing tasks: mission, goals, process, tasks, sub-committees, etc. (See Group Dev.)
* Create African centered form, process and roles (See Group Formation, this chapter)

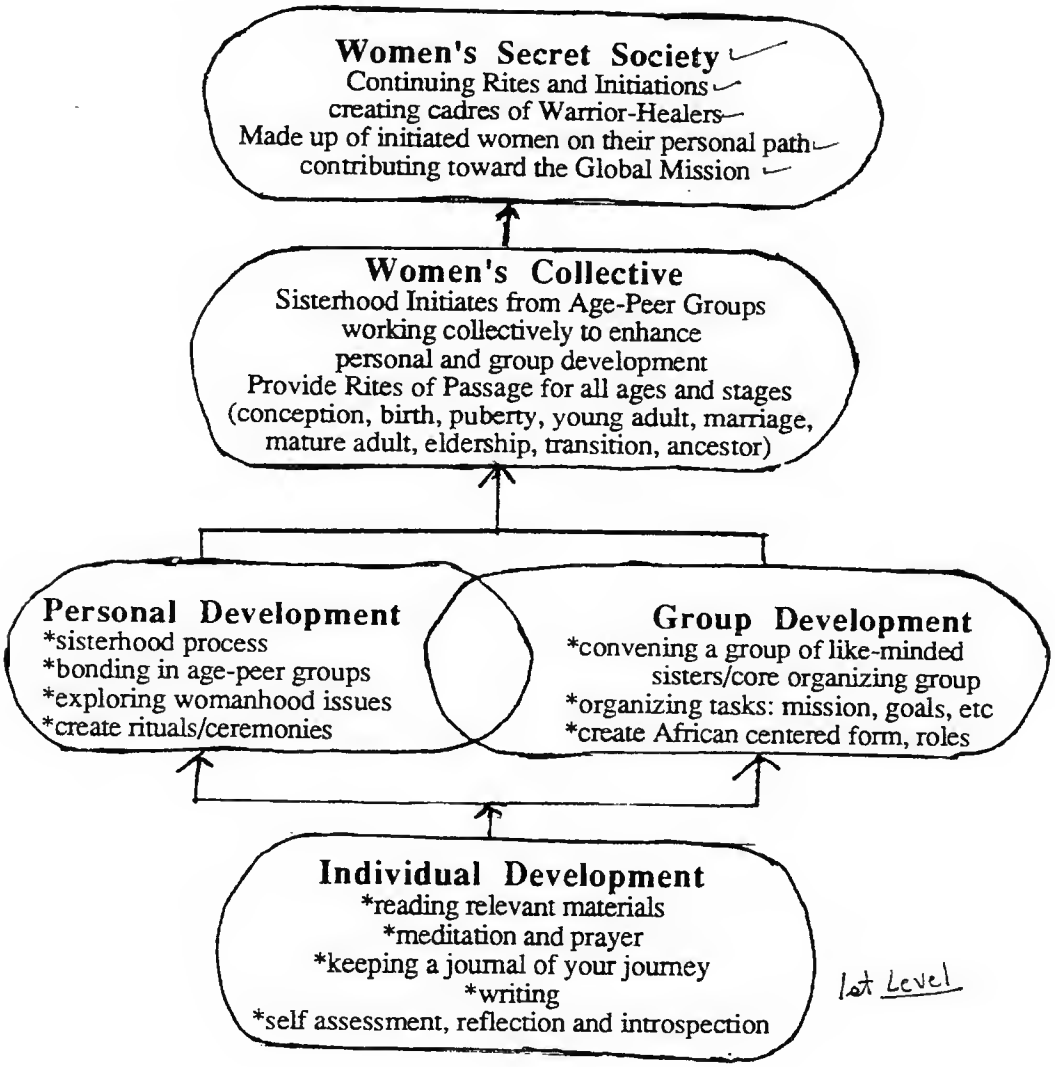
Rites for Adults and Youth

* Establishing a Women's Collective
* Provide sisterhood for initiates of all age-peer groups
* Work collectively to enhance personal and group development
* Provide Rites of Passage for all ages and stages: conception, birth, puberty, young adult, marriage, mature adult, eldership, transition, ancestor
* Continue to educate and draw community members into the positive activities, values and lifestyle

Women's Secret Society

The ultimate goal is the recreation of the traditional secret societies with contemporary meaning and mission. The membership will include the millions of African descent women providing balance and ancestral knowledge in their communities. While continuing rites, initiations as in the activities above there will be the creation of cadres of Warrior-Healers. The secret society will be made up of initiated women on their personal path contributing toward the Global Mission. (See Sisterhood, Women's Collective and Rites Model below).

Sisterhood, Women's Collective and Rites Model



Review this model from the bottom, going upward to higher levels.

*The first level of Individual Development is one where eurocentric persons remain.

*The second level requires continued Personal Development within the context of your group and simultaneously working collectively to create a group (Group Development) that will benefit more and more sisters.

*The next two levels expect to grow in a balanced unison with like Men's Collectives since all of the activities, goals and supports are focused on the development of the community:

*As the Women's Collective becomes stable it will expand to include more females of all ages providing the rituals around the life cycle offering support and protection for all of its members.

*Women's Secret Society grows from the energy of the Women's Collective with continuing rituals and levels of initiation. The Secret Society will ultimately place women in positions of power creating humanistic systems, as well as developing cadres of Warrior-Healers able to contribute to the global mission of UNITY.

The Global Mission: Initiation of Warrior-Healers

As females grow into womanhood one of the most important segments of development is spiritu enlightenment or awakening. Women have been known, since antiquity, to hold magical c mystical powers. Health and wellness, wholistically considered, includes the physical an spiritual properties of each person. Women were traditionally the healers, learning the simple an complex medicinal techniques of herbs and foods that would keep her family fit and in goo health. The lessons and medicines, including how to recognize them in the wild, gather an prepared them for human consumption, were passed down from mother to daughter or within th society of women who trained the young females (rites of passage). Of course, there have alway been some women (and men) in our communities who are spiritually gifted. The gifted ones o healers have offered assistance and comfort to individuals and the community as a whole particularly when the illness (physical and/or spiritual) was beyond the basic capabilities of th women in the family.

The state of being spiritually-gifted, enlightened or at a higher spiritual plane is often described as being able to "see", having "second sight" or "access to the other side." Persons, who are described as being "born with a veil" are likewise described as having the ability to "see" or encounters those who are in, or have passed to the spiritual world. Even in our commercial world, "Fortune Tellers" are called "Seers." Throughout time persons who have been called Spiritual Leaders or Healers have been those considered enlightened with the ability to offer spiritual comfort to those less endowed. Persons responsible for the heath and healing of their community must have the vision or ability to see beyond the surface of the illness.

Ghanaian writer Armah provides us with remarkable insight in his novel, The Healers. This novel creates a vision of African peoples' deadliest illness--disunity. The cure for our people worldwide is UNITY. It is the healer's job to provide the insight into our dis-ease and its cure. Therefore, the best healers are those with "sight" and "hearing" beyond the average person. The preparation of healers (Armah, 1978) is described in the following way:

> In the universe there are so many signs. A few we understand the way farmers know what clouds mean and fishermen understand the stars. But most signs means nothing to us because we aren't prepared to understand them. The healer trains his eye--so he can read signs. His training is of the ears--so he can listen to sounds and understand them. His preparation is also of the nostrils--life and death have their smells. It is of the tongue and the body's ability to feel (p. 80).

Armah goes on to describe this concept of sight and higher values for healers as a result of their nature, training and initiation in the following way:

> After his training the healer walks through the same world every person walks through. But he sees signs others don't see. He hears sounds others don't hear. . . . The healer learns the meaning of the river's sound, of the sounds of the forest animals. And when he needs the curing spirit from a plant, if his eyes are well prepared he may see from a great distance some small sign of the leaf that is ready to be taken. . . . But for a beginning he who would be a healer must set great value on seeing truly, hearing truly, understanding truly, and acting truly. The healer would rather see and hear and understand than have power over men. Most people would rather have power over men than see and hear. . . . the healer devotes himself to inspiration. He also lives against manipulation (Armah, 1978, pp. 80-81).

Armah continues to discuss the unity of the spirit and body as well as disease of the individual and of entire communities or societies. These revelations are pertinent to sisterhood or womanhood training as they can serve as a basis for healing an oppressed people, as individuals and in groups.

African women are trained in those skills, attitudes and values that are supportive of the family and community. Hence,

> [Manipulation] is a disease, a popular one. It comes from spiritual blindness. If I'm not spiritually blind, I see your spirit. I speak to it if I want to invite you to do something with me. If your spirit agrees it moves and your body acts. That's inspiration. But if I'm blind to your spirit I see only your body. Then if I want you to do something for me I force or trick your body into doing it even against your spirit's direction. That's manipulation. Manipulation steals a person's body from his spirit, cuts the body off from its own spirit's direction. The healer is a lifelong enemy of all manipulation. The healer's method is inspiration. . . . We heal people, individuals. That's part of our work. But it isn't all. It isn't even the greatest part of it. It's just a part. The whole of it concerns . . . wholeness. Those who learn to read the signs around them and to hear the language of the universe reach a kind of knowledge healers call the shadow. The shadow, because that kind of knowledge follows you everywhere. When you find it, it is not difficult at all. It says there are two forces, unity and division. The first creates. The second destroys; it's a disease, disintegration. . . . . Healing an individual person--what is that but restoring a lost unity to that individual's body and spirit? (pp. 81-82).

> A people can be diseased the same way. Those who need naturally to be together but are not, are they not a people sicker than the individual body disintegrated from its soul? Sometimes a whole people needs healing work. Not a tribe, not a nation. Tribes and nations are just signs that the whole is diseased. The healing work that cures a whole people is the highest work, far higher than the cure of single individuals (p. 82).

To do this healing work requires a clear understanding of the problems we face as a people and how we can use traditional means to cure and solve them. Women must continue to serve as leaders in the cure of unity. For it is we who raise the children and maintain unity in the basic unit of society--the family. As a people, Africans in America, have many problems which have resulted, at least in part, in movement away from the beliefs and values supportive to our essence. Oppression and enslavement merely accentuated the severity of our original dis-ease. To solve these problems we must look to traditional cures, processes and therapies.

Armah goes on to share an analysis of illness and that which cures--health and unity (which are the same thing).

> When one person in a community--body and soul clashes with another individual in the same community, that too is disease. . . .The ending of all unnatural rifts is healing work. When different groups within what should be a natural community clash against each other, that also is disease. That is why healers say that our people, the way we are now divided into petty nations, are suffering from a terrible disease. . . (pp. 82-83).

Finally, Armah provides an explanation of some symptoms of dis-unity and what must be done to begin the cure. He prophetically reminds us that because the disease has gone unchecked for such a long time, that the cure will not come overnight, but will require patience, perseverance from the masses of people. Women are our community's natural healers and therefore should be trained (during the initiation process) to recognize the symptoms and illness when it is in view:

> The events that have shattered our people were not simply painful events. They were disasters. They were strange unnatural catastrophes. Those who survived them could only survive in part because they found ways to forget the catastrophes. When you're still close to past dangers that threaten to wipe you out, even remembrance pains you. Our people forgot a lot of things to survive. We even went beyond forgetfulness. To forget thoroughly the shattering and

dispersal of a people that was once whole, we have gone so far as to pretend we have always been silly little fragments each calling itself a nation. . . .

> Forgetfulness helps the diseased cross over the time of greatest pain. It is sort of like sleep, like the sleep brought on by herbs to help a sick man rest when his disease has exhausted him. In that case forgetfulness works towards health. But when the period of forgetfulness is prolonged unnaturally, then it doesn't work towards health. It works towards death (p. 83).

Armah concludes that the healers' job is to awaken the people who have slept too long--we mus awaken from a terrible disease, unchecked for such a long time (centuries). The healers must se beyond the present and tomorrow to a cure centuries in the future. The cure--unity or wholenes of all the earth's Black people, is often inconceivable to most people (including some healers) Confusion sometimes comes from impatience and despair due to the enormity of a job whicl cannot be totally accomplished in any one persons life time. Wholeness begins with th individual, moves to the group, the family, community and society. A first step toward wholeness of all African people must begin with unity of self, with gender peers and othe groups.

Women of African descent must continue to create progressive roles for ourselves as we struggl along side our men for ascension and liberty. We must assist in the creation of warrior-healers The concept of warrior-healer, while sounding dichotomous, is in actuality two complementar manifestations of the same force. The warriors of Western cultures only destroy. So we mus leave this cultural definition behind. Warriors protect, defend and destroy. Confronting th enemy through the knowledge of our people and our culture is the warrior's task. Healer protect, defend and transform the destruction into new life. Confronting our internal enemy t create a cure to our dis-unity is our healer's task. Therefore, our initiated women (and men warrior-healers have the dualistic, death-rebirth assignment moving toward our global mission o UNITY.

Womanhood rite of passage or initiation should include a review of the global challenges fo African people. Initiation for women (and men) is the development of warrior-healer skill outlined by Amen, Som`e, Armah and others:

Initiation of Warriors-Healers for the Global Mission

* seeking to understand the signs and language of the universe.
* set a greater value on seeing, hearing, understanding, and acting than having power over people.
* devotes oneself to inspiration and against manipulation.
* understand the relationship between spiritual blindness and manipulation.
* understand the importance of the unity of the spirit and body.
* increase understanding of the dis-ease of the individual and communities.
* understand the concept of wholeness for the individual, community and people.
* seek to understand the knowledge that healers call the shadow.
* seek to understand the two universal forces--unity and division.
* seek to understand the highest healing work that cures a whole people.
* increase understanding of health and unity as the same thing.
* understand the symptoms of disease such as:
  when a person in a community clashes with another individual
  unnatural rifts or clashes in a natural community
  the way we are now divided into petty groups or nations
  the period of forgetfulness prolonged unnaturally, that works towards death.
* understanding the history and events that have shattered our people as strange, unnatural catastrophes.
* understanding the relationship between survival, sleep and forgetfulness.
* identify the things that our people forgot in order to survive.

* seek to understand the cures to forgetfulness, the shattering and dispersal of a people once calling itself a nation.
* seek to understand women role as our community's natural healers.
* understand why rites of passage/initiation should include the cure of unity.
* understand why the cure is centuries in the future requiring patience and perseverance from healers and the people.
* understand how confusion relates to impatience and despair.
* seek to understand wholeness as an the individual, group, family, community and societal and people goal.

Amen (1992) suggests that to conquer the evil in society we must first defeat the evil in individuals. Hence, we shall begin with our personal cure by identifying our individual strengths and challenges.

Recommended Activities

Adults

Read and discuss The Healers in relation to the purpose and need for women's collectives serving to understand the goals of womanhood initiation.

Discuss initiation and sisterhood as a treatment for our global cure of unity.

Personal Strengths, Passages and Challenges

"A little trickle of water that goes alone, goes crookedly"

Every woman is a part of a larger collective of women. African women's collectives must become the structures in which individual women locate themselves. It is here that we will become refined, cultivated, knowledgeable, and fully aware of our powers and responsibilities as women. Our body of knowledge must include child bearing and rearing, home management, care of one's mate, beauty and the arts, healing, home crafts, ethics, and morality which we learn, practice and teach. We demonstrate this learning by taking care of our health, being productive, artistic, well-groomed, well-mannered and respectable. These are the qualities that bring individual admiration and reflect on our good name as a group (Boone, 1986). Our mission of global unity or healing our groups and communities is added as a sisterhood goal.

Sisterhood characteristics support the cohesion and inner security of all the women. The maintenance and restoration of harmony in the group is the goal of all the activities. If there are complaint or conflicts assemblies are called to hear complaints, call witnesses with an emphasis on discussion, concession and compromise. If necessary, a communal ritual will bring together to provide a healing for the entire community. Heavy offenses may draw fines or restitution of property and apologies. Women should always be inclusive and wrong doings are resolved so that reinstatement can be maintained. Traditionally, women were given spiritual baths to cleanse and respiritualize the body. There are no secrets among women as they are supportive and tolerant of every person in their group. All topics can be discussed matter-of-factly without shyness or shame.

Honest assessment of one's strengths and challenges is the first step toward growth. Spiritual growth, for those of us raised in a materialistic Western society, remains the greatest of our challenges. Intellectual, physical growth is generally the easier areas in which to excel because the society focuses on and accepts these as legitimate and capital producing ways to grow. Sister Vanzant (1992) has offered us a Spiritual Code of Conduct which provides guidelines for thinking and acting in a God-like manner. As she says, it is not sufficient to pray, meditate or use creative visualization. To be truly on the spiritual path one must confirm that the self is an expression of the Supreme Being and acknowledge the same quality in others (Vanzant, 1992). This judgement free code includes the following principles:

Spiritual Code of Conduct (See Appendix for Scale)

1. **"Unconditional Love--Not to be confused with lust, or love of one because they love you. Eliminates fear"** (p. 109). If you see all people and all things as an extension of yourself you will treat them as you wish to be treated. Unconditional love requires that one surrender judgement, criticism and ego.

2. **"Truth--Not to be confused with what you think or know. Truth is consistent and will not harm anyone. Eliminates ego"** (p. 109). Truth is consistent in producing strength and peace for everyone, not just one individual. One must accept truth, speak truth, teach truth and seek truth for true spiritual empowerment.

3. **Willingness**--The ability to give up self-centered desire and do what is in accordance with spiritual law. This act of faith eliminates feelings of limitation.

4. **"Righteousness--Not to be confused with, I want to be right. Eliminates manipulation"** (p. 109). Action based on truth and what is correct for the maintaining of balance and harmony.

5. **"Responsibility--Not to be confused with self-sacrifice and self-denial, or actions that impress others. Eliminates blame"** (p. 110). Being consciously accountable for one's desires, thoughts which manifest in actions.

6. **"Discipline--Not to be confused with selfishness, or self-denial. Eliminates procrastination"** (p. 110). Assess whether you are doing all that you can to reach your goals without harming anyone along the way (including self).

7. **"Humility--Not to be confused with being a doormat or sacrificing the self to please someone else. Eliminates feeling used"** (p. 110).

8. **Compassion**--The ability to walk in the other persons shoes and treat them as you want to be treated.

9. **"Perseverance--Not to be confused with stubbornness or reckless action. Eliminates mental and physical confusion"** (pp. 110-111).

10. **"Patience--Not to be confused with laziness or inactivity. Eliminates hasty action"** (p. 111).

11. **"Speaking With a Conscious Tongue--Not to be confused with speaking your mind or saying what you feel. Eliminates negative words and energy"** (p. 111).

12. **"Selflessness--Not to be confused with doing something to get something, or acting to get acceptance. Eliminates quest for ruthless power"** (p. 111).

13. **"Tithing--Not to be confused with paying someone for spiritual work. Eliminates supporting unworthy spiritual sources"** (p. 111). To assist in the maintainence of spiritual education by giving freely. Tithing enacts the law of reciprocity.

These important spiritual values and conduct can be used as a basis of assessing one's growth and areas of personal challenge. Another assessment of oneself or one's shadow can be accomplished by using the Shadow Questionnaire (See appendix).

Recommended Activities
Adults

Review the two personal assessments in the appendix: Spiritual Code of Conduct and Shadow Questionnaire. Decide which one (or if both) is suitable--personal evaluation.

Complete the assessments for yourself, including personal goals. Then schedule a time when the group can share their assessments with each other. Allow time for the group to offer their suggestions, observations and support of each persons

In addition to assessing oneself along the Spiritual Code of Conduct and or introspection using the Shadow Questionnaire, other passages should be reviewed. Use the chart below (See Appendix for Scale) to consider the events and lessons you have learned, noting where there is still room for growth. This assessment is a wholistic approach which can subsume the two previous scales.

Personal Assessment of Strengths, Passages and Challenges

Area	Event(s)	Lesson(s)	Growth Needs
educational	**Example:**		
career	Never completed work for diploma/degree	Fear of losing fiance	Need to prioritize personal goals for family's benefit.
marriage			Need to open communication with husband.
conflicts			
parenthood independence of children			
family harmony			
managing death/separation			
painful events			
illness/diseases			
eldership			
spiritual passage			
other_____			

Every significant thing that happens to us throughout our life is an opportunity for learning. In particular, painful events are the greatest opportunity for evaluating one's beliefs, attitudes, behavior, relationships, images (may include dreams), and direction. This worksheet (see appendix) can be used as a guide to keep notes on accomplishments and areas where you need additional growth. Recall and record some significant events in your life. Analyze them for lessons and share some of them with others to get a new perspective on your strengths and goals.

Recommended Activities

Adults

Step One: Complete the assessments individually noting any special challenges one may have overcome and areas where work is still needed.

Step Two: Share personal assessment with your sisterhood circle noting goals.

Keep a written journal of your progress in areas of spiritual and other conduct.

Expected Outcomes

- Bonding of members as a result of interpersonal sharing over time.
- Camaraderie develop due to assessment of common issues.
- Providing support and advise to sisters.
- Increased individual and group insights.
- Assess what will be appropriate for youth based the adult group's process and passage.

Youth

Provide an opportunity for youth to be interviewed at the beginning of the rites process. Comment on their strengths, goals and challenges. Make note of their assessment and the assessment of a parent or guardian.

Present a value system such as the Nguzo Saba or the 10 Virtues (Kemet). (In Appendix)

Discuss the proverb: "A little trickle of water that goes alone, goes crookedly."

Provide initiates with the opportunity to assess their progress at the end of the rites process. Provided them with positive feedback and constructive criticism.

Group Strengths and Challenges

"A house is not built on rafters"

Start from the ground up to build your (house) womanhood group. An excellent source description of a traditional women's secret society is Boone's (1986) description of the Sande Society found among twelve tribal groups in the area of Sierra Leone, West Africa. Strive to use African centered principles and values. Once your group has formed there are stages and levels of progress that can be assessed as a collective. The characteristic for the African centered community of women are like any other group of which you may be a part. These characteristics can be used as guidelines or assessment tools (see appendix). African writer Som`e (1993) provides a partial list of African centered community or group attributes:

1. Unity of Spirit--the sense of unity is invisible but members are characterized as cells in a body--the group needs the individual and the individual needs the group.

2. Trust--everyone is moved to trust all other members of the group in an inclusive way. It is further assumed that everyone is inherently well-intentioned.

3. Openness--being open to the other members requires trust. Individual problems are taken on as community problems, so each person is open to others.

4. Loving and Caring--what one has belongs to the collective in the sense that not sharing diminishes the group to the enhancement of the individual.

5. Respect for the Elders--the elders represent the collective memory of the group. They are responsible for keeping the group together, initiating the young, prescribing appropriate rituals and monitoring the group's dynamics. .

6. Respect for Nature--wisdom is learned from observing nature; where medicine is located.

7. Circle of the Ancestors--those who have passed on are not considered dead or unavailable. The community of the spirits become a guide or inspiration to those living.

Recommended Activities

Adults

Discuss each of the seven attributes and their importance for your group.
Use the scale in the appendix to evaluate the group's status, goals, and progress.

Group Formation

There are, of course, many tasks that must be accomplished in the course of establishing one's group/collective. Individual's must make a heavy commitment in order to form and accomplish the work of the collective (women's initiation) at the same time. However, once the group is in working order the important goals can be attended to. To ignore either of these important goals may mean failure/death of the collective. The following is a list which can be used as guidelines in womanhood collective development. The best way to work with these objectives is to set aside a time when the whole group can come together to work on the formation in a cooperative manner. It is also important spread the smaller sub-tasks among all members so that a few do not become overburdened. (See Appendix for Forms).

1. Mission Statement--collective state the group's mission.

2. Goals/Objectives--a set of larger goals with several objectives to cover the breath of the area needed in the group's development.

3. Process Rules--develop guidelines for interactions between members.

4. Leadership--select persons who have time, commitment and people skills.

5. Group Cohesion--assess your group's bonding progress over time.

6. Managing Conflict--set forth guidelines to handle individual conflicts forth right.

7. Task Completion--set guidelines, realistic timetables, and reporting requirements.

8. Responsibilities--(individual. & sub-group)--assign tasks to individuals and small groups.

9. Spiritual Passage--assess the group's growth along spiritual and values characteristics.

10. Areas of Expertise--all members should list their expertise and interests.

Recommended Activities

Adults

Step One: *Review the requirements for positive ongoing collective growth.
*Set out plans to accomplish tasks allowing for time to assess process (how people are getting along), to share and provide group input to members with special challenges.
*Use the categories above to build the infrastructure of the collective relying on the multi-skilled membership.

Step Two: Share personal assessments and provide for incorporating new members (in a group-circle sisters) on an regular basis using the recommendations by the group and personal assessments as a basis for getting to know new members.

Step Three: Meet regularly (at least monthly) and evaluate individual and group progress (on an annual basis).

Discuss the proverb--"A house is not built on rafters"

Note: You may want to establish some pre-requisite for starting these activities--such as working with women whom you know, have worked with in the past, visited each others homes, shared individual issues--in other words, have already established some trust. Hold several organizational meetings to work out everyone's understanding of the collective goals.

Youth

Provide bonding activities throughout the rites process.

Provide ongoing, advanced, age and interest appropriate activities to groups that have completed the rites. May include working with new rites groups.

Ritual, Ceremony, Initiation and Sisterhood

"Hani gbe lewe ma ngele ya nja gbili kaango kpowa ee to"

"There is a thing passing in the sky; some thick clouds surround it; the uninitiated sees nothing"

Among the Mende people of Sierra Leone initiation is the condition of having insight or personal enlightenment. Nature and phenomena, metaphysically, are no longer hidden but become conspicuous and unambiguous. Female initiates are given their eyes to see. Eyes that will help them decipher the ways of the world and human nature; eyes that will deepen their knowledge, widen their vision, and bring wisdom. Bringing the girl to the condition of seeing or womanhood is as old as time (Boone, 1986). Som`e (1993) put the concept of initiation in the words of an elder, "Because they do not yet have ears that hear, nor eyes that see what cannot be seen and cannot be heard" (p. 76).

The rites of passage are sacred. They were never intended to be secular nor profane. Initiation or rites of passage go back as far as recorded history. (See Warfield-Coppock, 1992). The original and most ancient initiations were devised for one main purpose. That purpose was to become one with--or in harmony with God, the Creator. Amen (1992) tells us that the first stage of religious or spiritual initiation is the devotion to the God within us. There are many stages and years involved in a full initiation. The Kemetic initiation system (Amen, 1990, 1992) outlines the ten levels of initiation divided into three stages--devotion, heroic and spiritual master.

There are three types of ritual; (1) communal--where all members of the community are obliged to attend; (2) family rituals--where the head of the family leads a ritual for family unity for all family members; (3) individual ritual--which is performed for the individual is still interdependent with the other two types (Som`e, 1993).

Rituals are not compatible with the fast-paced industrialized life of American society. The absence of "time" (lineal) is consistent with a state of spiritual awareness. Constant motion, then, is movement away from the sacred, spiritual which can only be achieved through silent awareness (Som`e, 1993). African scholar and writer Malidoma Som`e suggests that the constant rapid motion keeps us from seeing things we do not want to see--the anger of nature within us, the anger of the gods and ancestors or the spiritual world in general. Ancestors are angry because we have thrown away our own culture for the culture of someone else. This the elders say, is an insult to the dead and we must reincorporate acknowledgement of our ancestors to cure the many illnesses of our people. Pain is an indication of the body at dis-ease and the soul or spirit in stagnation. The elders would say that pain is good because it will lead to creative action, reaching for the higher self and rebirth. Ritual, then, is the call to the ancients, ancestors or spirits to intervene in human affairs on behalf of the people. Ritual must have a purpose. It is designated by humans but can cause uprooting of unseen dysfunctions. There are also rituals whose impetus is not pain but preventive or celebrations of good things. This expression of oneness with the divine can avoid facing a pain related ritual later (Som`e, 1993).

One last important concept will be discussed before moving on to the sisterhood initiation. Numerous writers (Diallo, 1989; Mbiti, 1970; Som`e 1993, 1994) have shared the concept of the spiritual closeness between children and grandparents or elders. This is explained because one (the child) has just come from the other side--spiritual world)--and one (the elder) is close to returning. To "know" is to be old or close to the other world. The adult will not intercede in the relationship between the wise ones--the child and the elder. When the boundaries between this

world and the spirit world begin to blur it is time for a transformation. At adolescence the child has moved significantly away from her spirit nature that she must be prepared through initiation to take on the adult roles of the community. It is at this time that the adult becomes responsible for the learning exchange for the child's next step--womanhood: mate, motherhood, independent economic provider and warrior.

Rituals are transformative because they allow the individual to incorporate new learning and the collective can grow as well. Rituals assist the person(s) get in touch with the spiritual side of themselves. Ceremonies, on the other hand, are confirmative. Ceremony is the public display and celebration of changes in status. Ritual may be included in ceremony as a representation to observers and acknowledgement of the transition.

Rituals and ceremonies may be incorporated at each stage of development and as new members are included into the collective. Once oaths, opening and closing rituals as well as special ceremonial rituals are created for the group they can be standardized so that they will automatically be used all the time. The following components are generally included in an ongoing rites process and in the organizations that provide initiation. These may serve as the activities that, because they are standard components, opportunities for ritual and ceremonies.

Components of the Rites of Passage/Initiation Process

- Orientation/Introduction (ritual and ceremony--acknowledging entering of process toward new status)
- Core Curriculum Areas (ritual--reinforcement of transformations)
- Value System--Principles and/or Virtues (ritual--reinforcement of transformations)
- Separation/Rebirth (ritual and ceremony--ancient concept of death and rebirth)
- Council of Elders/Advisors (ritual and ceremony--incorporating ancient supports)
- Assessment of Completion (ritual and ceremony--challenges and celebration of transition)
- Final Rites Ceremony (ritual and ceremony--completion of process and new status)
- Post Rites Activities/Involvement (ritual--reinforcement of transformations)

Som`e (1993) has provided some guidelines and the elements of ritual:

> Ritual is never repeated the same way more than once. The structures remain the same but the elements such as music, rhythms, people doing the same thing should not be repeated.
>
> To invoke the spirit make the space sacred. The spirit will occur in the place you have designated.
>
> The elements of ritual include:
>
> 1. Invocation--to call on non-humans for a specific purpose.
>
> 2. Dialogical--when calling on non-humans one enters a dialogue with the spiritual. To invoke the spirit make the space sacred, which means we are sharing the space with others who do not have physical form.
>
> 3. Repetitive--the actions of the ritual are the same. A libation is a libation.
>
> 4. Opening and closure--opening is when the spirit is invoked and the space becomes sacred. Closing is when the spirit is sent away. Humans must always be humble when invoking the spirit and sending them away (thank them first). Accidents or conflict may result from not providing appropriate openings and closings.

Sample Induction Rituals (Females only, no men or children; no electronic devices or taping) Spiritual leaders may, if skill is available, ask for guidance on the preparation and presentation o the information that will be available to the group of women.

Spiritual leaders of the group should prepare the sacred space ahead of time:

*Spiritual Cleansing of the Room or Grounds (Florida Water, Prayers and/or Libations)
*Darkened room with drum music, soft rhythms, drums and or shake-a-rays
*Low table or floor with white cloth, candles and flowers in the center.
(large natural bowl or calabash with pitchers and cups of water)
*Chairs should be placed in a circle, or concentric circles for large groups;
elder women toward the front of the circle.
*Participants should wear something white or bring a white cloth.
*Participants should enter the room peacefully, without speaking, leave belongings on an available shelf or floor near the door. Find a chair and sit quietly or meditate until the group starts.

*Activities: Group Libation/Statement of Purpose
Meditation or balance through breath
Meet and greet
Random acts of kindness and/or commitment
Individual statements of commitment
Individual libations
Proverbs, sayings, wisdom that guides
Spiritual bath
Eating together/visiting/getting to know each other

Ongoing Preparation

*Opening Ritual — A reading, oath, poem, statement of commitment read or recited together while in a circle holding hands
Libation and/or prayer

*Activities — Readings and/or discussion based on an agenda
Eating together

*Closing Ritual — Similar or opening or statement by group's elder

Ceremonial Ritual

*Public Ceremony — Design opening and closing ahead of time

*Activities — Drum Call
Acknowledge ancestors and elders/Libations,Prayers
State the purpose of the public gathering
Music, drumming dance
Processions
Introducing initiates/statements/performances
Speaker
Call and response
Passage ritual
Community acknowledgement/participation
Closing
Feast/Socializing

****

NOW THAT YOU HAVE READ THIS--WAIT AND REFLECT. ALLOW SOME TIME T ABSORB THE MATERIAL BEFORE MOVING ON TO COLLECTIVE ORGANIZING.

****

Recommended Activities

Adults

Discuss the initiation proverb, "There is a thing passing in the sky; some thick clouds surround it; the uninitiated sees nothing" and/or

"The woman who uses her sister as her hairdresser, needs no mirror"

Read the poem, "bitchery. . ." out loud to one another. Discuss its implications and set sisterhood goals for the group.

Develop a bonding ritual for the group. Plan to repeat these annually.

Prepare an initiation experience for the group.

Youth

Provide bonding rituals throughout the rites process. Provide recommitment ceremonies annually.

Discuss the proverb, "The woman who uses her sister as her hairdresser, needs no mirror."

Provide a centering activity with initiates facing the four directions with the elder in the center. Explain the importance of each person finding their own center which is not like any other person's, and how one can use this practice to solve problems or face challenges. Provide them with some guided imagery, meditation, relaxation, etc. so that they can locate and become comfortable with their center as needed.

Conclusion

Regardless of where the individual or group stands, there is always room for growth. Women who are interested and/or plan to provide the rites experience for females should provide for themselves the experience of initiation and make a commitment to a sisterhood or women's collective. Only then will we be prepared, through the initiation and socialization of our daughters, for the work of reclaiming our heritage and the reascension of our people.

Resources (Selected Readings For Adult Female Preparation)

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*Finch, C. S. (1991). The great mother and the origin of human culture. In Echoes of the old darkland: Themes from the African Eden.
*Gordon, V. V. (1987). Black women feminism and Black liberation: Which way?
*Haich, E. (1974). Initiation.
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*Mataka, L. (1994). Restoring the queen.
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*Somadhi, S. (1981). Facing the shadow. Uraeus: The Journal of Unconscious Life. 2 (2), entire issue, 5-22, 49-50.
*Vanzant, I. (1992). Tapping the power within: A path to self-empowerment for Black women.
*Warfield-Coppock, N & B.A. Coppock (1992). Afrocentric theory and applications, Volume 2: Advances in the Adolescent rites of passage.

where the bitchery ends, sisterhood begins by Lanini Mataka

dont roll yr eyes at me
u dont even kno me
and if something evil were to jump off right now,
i might be the only person willing to help u.

don't stand in the corner
whispering about me
if u wanna kno something about me / ask me!
the fact that i dont work my thing
the way u do doesnt mean u have the right
to hold me in contempt.

my name is not bitch,
tramp
or slut
and if u dont want yr man
to communicate with me then keep him home,
but dont get mad with me
for being polite enuff to diaglogue with him
even though i'm not one of yr chosen few.

just becuz u & i dont gel
doesnt mean u shod turn yr kitty-kat friends
against me too.
how can my anguish
possibly make u feel good?

u & i arent strangers.
we ustah rule the world together.
we fought & escaped slavery together.
we cut each otha's cords
& gave birth together.
we cut the ropes
& buried the lynched together.
we've rejoiced in the coming of men
& wept at their departures;
and no matter how grossed-out life appeared
we handled it *together*.

so why are u acting like u dont kno me?

why are u lookin at me
out of the corner of yr eyes
trying not to see my point,
my situation,
my oppression.
why are u tryin to act like yr life is alright
but i'm the one with the problems?

why are u actin
like u've got more in common with miss anne,
than me?

why u tryin to deny that part of u
that is also me?
think about it.

we blossom from the same stems
and treat each otha like poison ivy
instead of afrikan violets.
think about it.

the core of all our afflictions
is witer than the blood
that is Black like we.
returning to the source
doesnt mean u have to wear yr hair like mine,
or dress like me or think and act like me.
why waste time
on our differences when we cld be basking
in the similarities.

from the beginning of any time that mattered,
we have worked our hips thru-out history
conceiving civilization after civilization
while givin the Blackman
something voluptuous to hold.
we have moaned on our thrones,
sang in huts,
cried in chains,
laughed in the fields
& screamed in technicolor
the ultimate tale of our luv for our men.

and as we now face
an overwhelmingly brutal hour
let us use our beulah-mae-nzinga powers
to celebrate our luv for one anotha.

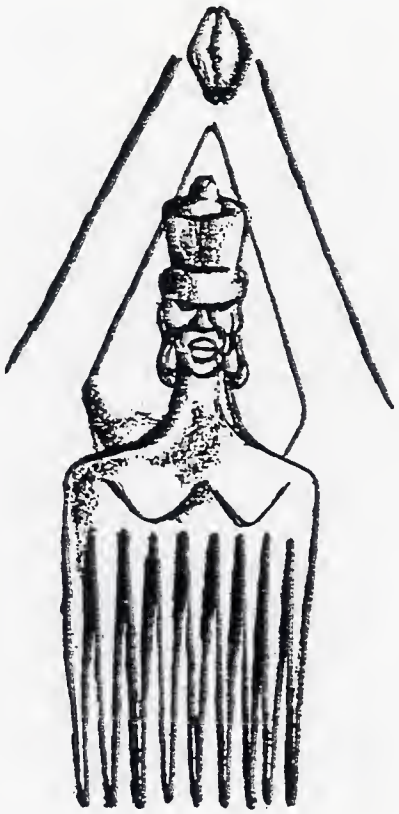
let this be the day we burn bitchery
& invoke sisterhood from its ashes.

let's start embracing each otha
& mean it.
let's ask sincerely about each otha
& mean it.
let's listen to each otha
& mean it.
let's comfort each otha
& mean it.
let's respect each otha
& mean it.

let's join our kings
& queen it!

Chapter 2
Concepts of African Womanhood

Anthropological and Physiological Uniqueness
Global Contributions of African Women
Roles of African Women
African Women as Warriors
African Socialization Patterns
African American Socialization Patterns
Resources



*DUAFE (The wooden comb). Symbol of
GOOD FEMININE QUALITIES: PATIENCE, PRUDENCE,
FONDNESS, LOVE & CARE
(Ofori-Ansa, 1978, poster)

*ADINKRA SYMBOLS of the Akan People in the language of Twi. The Ghanaian people, of West Afrika, developed these symbols, and printed them on the sacred cloth made for royalty and spiritual leaders for the important and sacred rituals and ceremonies including the various rites of passage/initiation.

Chapter 2
Concepts of African Womanhood

"When you have touched the women you have struck a rock"

Chapter Goals

1. Increase knowledge and understanding of the uniqueness of the African woman from an anthropological and physiological viewpoint.

2. Increase knowledge and understanding of the historical contributions of African women.

3. Increase knowledge and understanding of the roles of the African woman, traditional and contemporary, as mother, wife and independent economic provider.

4. Increase knowledge and understanding of African women as warriors or fighting for the rights and causes of her people.

5. Increase the knowledge and understanding of the traditional socialization practices of African and African American women.

Introduction

a nation cannot grow without its women
the intelligence of a nation
is reflected in its women
who bear the children for the nation
and are charged with the early education of the nation.
a nation cannot have intelligent women
unless the women are treated intelligently
and given much love.
(Madhubuti, 1973, p. 53)

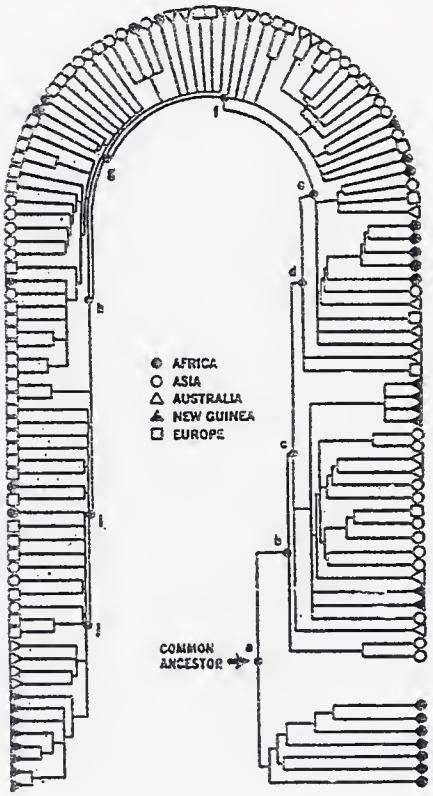
There is so little accurate, affirming, or flattering information available about the African woman in current research or in popular culture. This must change. We must teach young females and males the preeminent and profound contributions of African women since the beginning of time. The concepts of progenitor of humankind, innovator, sustainer, nurturer and warrior must be shared if there is going to be a balanced view of African history and the accomplishments of our people. Secondly, African American men and women will never be able to survive the onslaught of war without a respectable appreciation for each other. To these ends this chapter presents rudimentary data that can enlighten and pique our interest and curiosity for seeking out further knowledge for the upliftment of African descended women and our young African females. African women and adolescent females must understand their unique roots and ancestry to establish an accurate and healthy sense of self.

Anthropological and Physiological Uniqueness

The African woman is the mother of humankind (Barashango, 1989; Rensberger, 1987; Van Sertima, 1990). "Eve," according to scientists, is the one maternal ancestor common to all family trees in the human race which trace back 200,000 years. The studies sampling people of the races of the world led geneticists to conclude that, along with known evolutionary theory, the common ancestor was an African woman (Rensberger, 1987).

This drawing, (Figure 2.1) reproduced from reports by anthropologists, clearly illustrates the importance of African women to humankind. Based on these studies (Rensberger, 1987) "Eve" based on the biological evidence that when a sperm (which has no mitochondria) fertilizes an egg, the embryo inherits only the mother's gene structure or mitochondria. By comparing the mitochondria from the 147 known peoples of Africa, Asia, Australia, New Guinea and Europe, scientists found that the mitochondria changed 2 to 4% every million years. (The diagram was reprinted in The Washington Post from Nature Magazine.)

Figure 2.1
"Eve"



EVE'S Family Tree: A Genealogical Puzzle
This "family tree" shows the relative similarity of genes from 134 people from populations ancestral to Africa, Asia, Australia, New Guinea, Europe and their relation to a common maternal ancestor--whom scientists have dubbed Eve. The shorter the "branch" or line connecting one individual (denoted by a circle, triangle or square) to another, the more similar the genes of those individuals. They study covered 147 people, some with the same gene type. Because genetic differences accumulate over time, the length of connecting lines between individuals is also proportional to the length of time that has lapsed since they shared a common ancestry (Rensberger, 1987).

Figure 2.2
Mitochondria DNA in the Human Cell

Genetic Clues
Our cells carry the history of humankind's development, a path scientists have followed toward discovery of "Eve."

NUCLEUS WITH DNA:
A mixture of genes from both parents.

MITOCHONDRIAL DNA:
Inherited only from the mother and therefore not a mixture of parental gene pools. By studying these molecules, scientists devised the theory of a common female ancestor.

In the earliest of times African woman was considered magical and the closest to the concept of the Divine because of her ability to bring life to the physical plane. The African woman was and remains a standard of beauty as the Eve, the first mother/ancestor of humankind. As the standard of beauty, her form of full breasts, large thighs and buttocks, and wide hips was attributed to the sacred life-giving mother by early societies. Writers have recorded this ancient mind-set as a prelude to understanding how the African and woman-focused world became eurocentrically and male dominated. (Reviewed by Diop).

The earliest of humankind was not aware of the link between the sex act and procreation. Woman, then, was considered Divine and magical. The female was eventually defined in relation to four blood mysteries (Finch, 1991). The first appearance of blood, or menarche, transformed the female into a beautifully sculptured and sexually appealing woman. The pre-pubsecent girl became a potentially life-producing human. The second mystery was the cessation of the blood and the filling out of the female form while pregnant. The female grew in her voluptuous appearance throughout the child-bearing years. The third mystery was the reappearance of the blood and water and the new life. Finally, the fourth mystery was the final cessation of the blood, the end of the child-bearing years, when the woman would give herself up to death and ritualistic reincorporation into the familial bloodline by surrendering her body to be eaten (symbolically) by her clan. Totem animals came to represent motherhood and were sacramentally eaten in place of the human mother (Finch, 1991). The woman, then, had a long history of awe and reverence by the male of the species. There was no role for fathers during these times since the link between sexual intercourse and procreation had not been established. The supremacy of the female principle is therefore, seen throughout the symbolic and material plane.

Additionally, many advances in civilization are attributed to the African/Kemetic woman. The collection of grains, seeds, roots, berries and plants served as the prelude to the invention of the cultivation of seeds and agriculture. The fields in Africa have always been cultivated by the women and passed down to their daughters (Finch, 1991). Female dominance is seen in other areas, such as pottery, weaving, the regulation of trade, establishment of the calender, etc. In fact, the keeping of time was based on her monthly cycle. It is much later that skills and services are correlated to the males of the societies. Barashango (1989) states;

> The role of the Black Woman in the establishment of civilization is irrefutable for she made possible all the treasures of civilization that we now hold so dear. From time immemorial, man has depended upon woman for the development of the arts and sciences of civilization. . . . So profound was the Afrikan Woman's contribution to the growth and advancement of humanity that she was enshrined in the hearts of the people of the early civilizations . . . It is because of her that we are able to eat an abundant variety of healthy and tasteful foods, live in houses, write the alphabet, record time, reckon mathematics and conduct ourselves in the world with some semblance of civility (p. 2).

Clearly, this brief review of scientific data shows the importance, throughout time, of the African woman. African females and males must to be shown this valuable but generally omitted data relating to our historical origins.

Recommended Activities

Adults

Use passages, articles, pictures, or books that can be shared with the sisters in your group related to the topics of African womens' uniqueness.

Discuss your family tree and historical origins.

Youth

Present the information on anthropological and physiological uniqueness using text and personal information, stories, pictures, movies, music, etc.

Each female will outline her family tree and discuss it with her sisters (youth and adult).

Global Contributions of African Women

African Women. According to many historians, researchers, and writers, the African woman has played significant roles in many areas of life. She has a history of organizing and leading great trade networks and empires, as entrepreneurs and independent economic providers for her family. The African woman served as the source of mens' power and authority, served as a guard of royal lineage, waged battles against her rivals for power and wars against European invader, sometimes when the men cowered. In general the African woman has, throughout history been a community stabilizer or sustainer. All of these areas are rich and fertile ground for research by young initiates (See resources).

One important role of the African woman has always been the birthing, nurturing and caring for the offspring of the clan/community. This multi-talented and multi-faceted woman played several roles--wife, leader, business woman and, of course, nurturer and care giver for the both the male and the offspring. She was able to do this because the interdependent social systems that developed were decidedly group-oriented and were inclusive of multiple mothering for all children of the clan. Noble (1976) suggests that African motherhood was a collective experience, not simply based on an exclusive attachment to one's own biological offspring. In fact, from birth a child may be suckled by other women in the clan. African women then, have been natural allies in the producing, nurturing, and providing for their collective children.

Steady (1981) defines power as control over the existence of others and has distinguished the African woman with real power as opposed to formal power that may be attributed to those in the political arena. Her natural and real power lies in the fact that she is pivotal to the survival of her family, clan, or group. As the chief providers of food--including the production, processing, distribution and consumption , she clearly wields power. Further, Steady suggests, the intrinsic value of her role as mother is linked to the concept of fertility and survival of the land. In some societies the rituals linked to the birth and death of females are more elaborately celebrated than those of men (Kaberry, 1952). The life giving quality of women is traditionally equated with prestige.

Recommended Activities

Adults Use passages, articles, pictures, or books that can be shared with the sisters in your group related to the topics of African womens' contributions to history.

Youth Share with girls passages, article, pictures, or book that you will share with the sisters in your group related to the topics of African womens' contributions to history.

Provide powerful family elders to share and discuss contributions, recollections and methods and goals.

African American Women. There is no reason to suggest that African American women believe or behave any differently than their female ancestor. While the slavery experience may have caused an upheaval in the relationships in Africa by forcibly removing important members of the community, the same behaviors, attitudes, and interactions would be easily transplanted to the new land and condition. Stolen Africans would not rid themselves of the behavior they had been raised with for centuries. It is easier to believe that African women adapted their roles to survive in America while holding on to concepts of independence and interdependence.

Using the African woman framework, then, there are three major components to womanhood. First, a women is knowledgeable about her role as a nurturing, loving, and self-sacrificing parent. A mother does not automatically make a female a woman. We know from the explosion of babies having babies that girls are having their own children at a very young age to have someone to love them. This motivation has little or nothing to do with the ideals of our ancestors where the woman's major role was to fulfill her place in a family lineage and raise children to become competent adults and citizens. In addition to carrying on the family lineage, a woman knows that

her role as parent is paramount to fulfilling the needs of others (including the child's father/her husband) and herself.

Historically, African American women have played significant roles in the life of their community and of course in their families. The values and beliefs that African women brought with them have been adapted to serve the new environment and situations. However, basic values and attitudes toward work, children, spouses have remained the same.

According to McCray in Rodgers-Rose (1980), the African American woman has historically had what is labelled the "extended caring" role.

> Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of our survival has been a deep resource of humanistic values. Do not misunderstand me; suggestion is not being made that all Black people have all these humanistic values to the exclusion of others. Our cultural heritage, our historic roles in this society, and the experience of oppression and strong religious beliefs have combined to develop, generally, within our people a special set of humanistic values (p. 70).

McCray traces these values to; (a) African cultural heritage; (b) strong religious beliefs; (c) the "caring roles" African Americans were placed in due to the social and economic situation and; (d) recognition of the need for mutual aid and interdependence in order to survive the oppressive societal forces. Finally, McCray states that the African woman's role served to entrench the concept of the extended family because of the high values placed on caring for others, the sense of interdependence/social responsibility and the need to care for children who may be left when a mother was sold. The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, although fictional, depicted this historically accurate situation. Jane, who was only a girl herself, and non-kin, took on the nurturing role for Ned, Big Laura's son, when she was killed by patrols following emancipation. Ned knew no other mother, for Jane played that role until he was killed as an adult.

Robert Hill has two books which point out strengths in the African American family and its women in particular. The Strengths of Black Families (1972) and Informal Adoption Among Black Families (1977) has discussed the extended nature of African American families, the strong kinship bond and the willingness to absorb children. He estimated that in 1969 approximately 160,000 out of wedlock babies were absorbed into existing families, thus eliminating the increase in female headed household, but adding to the existing extended families pattern of African Americans.

In conclusion, young initiates should study the historical contributions of African women on the continent and in the Americas. Each of the disciplines, science, history, anthropology, etc. offers opportunities for research and study of the history and gifts of African women

Recommended Activities

Adults Bring a passage, article, pictures, or book related to African American womens' contributions to history, science, the arts, etc. that you want share with the sisters in your group .

Youth Share passages, articles, pictures, or books related to African American womens' contributions to history, eg.stories from Growing Up Black by Jay David.

Attend a historical play or movie.

Roles of African Women

To understand the African American woman, we must first become familiar with the African woman and the roles, beliefs and expectation, that she brought with her to America. The socialization process using the extended family, secret societies and rites of passage taught girls their roles and assured survival of the tribes' values and customs. The period of enslavement

broke down some of the traditional customs because secret societies and ceremonies were not allowed. The African American woman retained the major roles of her foremothers, bringing also the same attitudes toward her three major roles-mother, wife and independent businesswoman. While there are many negative stereotypes of the African American woman, particularly around sexuality, she has retained the dignity, fortitude and stamina of her African ancestors.

According the Rodgers-Rose,

> The African woman, when she came to America, had the following attitudes, beliefs, and expected role behavior. The survival of the children was paramount in the culture. The raising of children was more important than the role of wife. Usually the African woman was part of a polygamous family, taking her turn in the routine to perform the functions of a wife. When she became pregnant, she left her husband and returned to her father. Quite often the separation was at least three years long, and each subsequent pregnancy followed the same process. The West African woman was independent. She controlled the economic marketplace, often becoming wealthy. What she earned belonged to her, and further, she felt that her husband should not take care of her, rather, she must earn her own way (1980, pp. 17-18).

According to Little (1973) the African womans' role is ascribed rather than achieved. Additionally, her status is affected by a variety of conditions including:

* her family's religious practices - traditionalist, Christian, Moslem
* the rules of residence
* her rank, such as Queen Mother, and the special prerogatives and duties that go with rank
* age-older women are held in high esteem and may serve as heads of extended families
* marriage - type
* kinship and lineage

It is the rule rather than the exception to find the African woman in a complementary yet subordinate position to her male relatives and spouse. Even in matrilineal families a woman was under the authority/guardianship of her mother's brother or her own brother.

Mother--the most important role to the African woman because through her the lineage, group and way of life survived. There were and still are wide variations in ethnic customs in the manner in which a pregnancy is handled, but to be sure, they all provide a mother the peace and protection she needs to bring a healthy baby to term. In some patrilineal families there are only several months of sexual abstinence in the wife's own quarters and among other tribes the woman returns to her father's house for a year, or up to three years, as Rodgers-Rose indicated. The customs ensured survival of the infant and the return of the mother to good health, since many people were around to ensure that the mother got her proper rest and was not overtaxed. The separation of the husband and wife's living quarters and customs of abstinence assured that a woman would not have too many children in quick succession and allowed her to adequately nurture each of her children. In polygamous households a pregnant wife had co-wives to share the responsibility of her husband.

Wife--the conjugal unit did not take the paramount position in the lives of Africans as it does among other ethnic groups. Therefore, while marital status was required of all able-bodied persons, it did not become the all consuming life role. There were many things that required the African woman's attention, particularly the bearing and raising of the family's children. The conjugal unit required much less attention because it was so stable in the extended family concept. The concept of romantic love played only a small part in the husband and wife relationship. There was a mandatory courtship period, but it looked more like a company merger to the Western eye. Once the ceremony and honey-moon period were over, the partners got back to the duties required of them. In the case of the wife, these were the management of her husband's household and her

own economic endeavors. If she was joining another wife or wives, she set up her own separate quarters and joined in the family's routine.

In America it is not uncommon to hear a young girl or woman say that she plans to be a wife and mother (listed in the level of priority) and not consider a career or job. American women are known to attend college to "catch" their life's support system -- that is, men who will completely financially support them throughout their lives. These examples contrast greatly with the African pattern.

Independent Economic Provider--The African woman comes from a long line of economically independent women who were not dependent on their husband but made significant contributions to their families and communities. Traditionally, African women provided the majority of the services and products needed by the members of the families and community. Many assured some profit by growing food for their family's consumption as well as sale. Others plied a trade as well. The list of businesses that African women may have engaged in include:

Farming & Husbandry - yams, tomatoes, onions, roots, chickens, fish, rice, couscous, eggplant, corn, etc.
Bakery - bread
Clothing - cloth, weaving, sewing
Hair dressing

In traditional Africa there may not have been an exchange of money for services, but a woman exchanged her skills, talents or services for other services or food that her family needed.

In modern Africa, women are found in some of the following positions:

Journalists, Broadcasters, Entertainers
Dress designers, Hair dressers, Hotel managers
Charge hands in factories, Telephonists, Radio announcers
Secretaries/clerical workers/.administrative and executive workers
Banking industry--from tellers to officials or owners
Teachers, Tailors, cutters, furriers, etc.
Retail, wholesale and street venders
Government workers at most levels
Scientists, Medical workers--doctors, midwives, technicians, nurses, administrators, etc.
Foreign company employees (Little, 1973).

Example of a traditional (nomadic, gatherer-hunter !Kung people from areas in Botswana, Angola and Namibia) African woman's life-excerpts from Nisa by anthropologist Shostak (1983):

> Although the !Kung were experiencing cultural change, it was still quite recent and subtle and had thus far left their traditional values system mostly intact. A study revealing what !Kung women's lives were like today might reflect what their lives had been like for generations, possibly even for thousands of years. . . . The day-to-day organization of subsistence is as complex as the seasonal round. !Kung women contribute the majority (from 60 to 80 percent by weight) of the total food consumed. Averaging little more that two days a week in quest for food, they gather from among 105 species of wild plant foods, including nuts, beans, bulbs and roots, leafy greens, tree resin, berries, and an assortment of other vegetables and fruits. . . . . Most women share what they bring home, but there are no formal rules for distribution of gathered foods and those with large families may have little left over to give others. . . . I learned that it was considered bad manners to brag or to act in an arrogant way. . . . I could see for example, how much they relied on on one another and closely they usually sat together. . .. !Kung women also care for children and perform a variety of daily domestic chores. They average close to four hours a day in maintaining their subsistence tools and in housework: fetching water, collecting firewood, maintaining fires, making huts (frame and thatching), arranging bedding, and preparing and serving food (including cracking nut for themselves and their young children) . . . . Women's status in the

community is high and their influence considerable. They are often prominent in major family and band decisions, such as where and when to move and whom their children w marry. Many also share core leadership in a band and ownership of water holes and foraging areas. Just how influential they really are and how their status compares with that of men is a complicated question: women may in fact, be nearly equal to men, but tl culture seems to *define* them as less powerful. In other words, their influence may be greater than the !Kung-of either sex-like to admit (emphasis hers; pp. 6; 12-13).

Recommended Activities

Adults Familiarize yourself and share with the sisters in your group the topics of womer roles--prioritized from mother, mate and independent economic provider.

Youth Share with girls information on the importance of the roles of women.
Use book passages or media as a basis of discussion.
(eg. biographies of African women; "Images of Black Women: Myth and Reality' a program aired through NBC AT & T Funding)

African Women As Warriors

"Blessed are those who struggle.
Oppression is worse than the grave.
Better to die for a noble cause,
than to live and die a slave."

A warrior is a person who goes to war or struggles for the mission, goals and rights of her or hi people. While this term is generally thought of or attributed to the male of the human species, w find that among African women the term is decidedly applicable.

African Women Warriors. Sweetman (1984) describes these better known African womer warriors/leaders:

Hatshepsut of Kemet (Egypt) (15th Century BC; Ruled about 1490-68). Daughter of King Thutmose I. Reigned with her elder brother for eight years until he died, then as the first and mos powerful woman leader in Kemet. She was depicted as a man on the structures she had built.

Candace of Meroe (3rd Century BC to 2nd Century AD; about 284 BC - AD 115). South of Kemet, Meroe, (Nubia or Kush) had so many great women leaders that the outside world believed it never had a king. When the Romans invaded Kemet, Candace, the Kushite leader ordered an attack which overran the fort and carried off a statue of the Roman Emperor Augustus.

Amina of Hausaland (present day upper Nigeria; 15th or 16th Century). The most famous ruler and greatest warrior, Queen Amina, created a great empire and led fierce warriors into battle. Songs of her deeds are still sung today. Amina was sixteen when her mother, also a warrior, became queen. Her reign of 34 years coincides with the period of the expansion of Hausa trade and crafts such as weaving and leather.

Nzinga of Angola (About 1581-1663) born during the early battles with the Portuguese. When Nzinga's brother, Mbandi, became leader he killed his younger brother and Nzinga's son. But he was a weakling, surrendered the silver mines to the Portuguese, and asked Nzinga to help him negotiate a peace treaty. When Nzinga and her royal entourage met with the Portuguese governor, de Souza, there was only one chair. Nzinga ordered one of her servants to kneel as a human chair, while she successfully negotiated. The slave-hungry Portuguese did not fulfill their end of the bargain. Nzinga eventually had her brother and his sons killed, formed an army and attacked the Portuguese towns to win back her country's independence. When the Dutch appeared, Nzinga continued to negotiate and fight. Nzinga is known as the Warrior Queen who never surrendered and has been an inspiration to the long years of war toward Angola's independence.

Dona Beatrice of Kongo (About 1682-1706), priestess of noble birth, converted the country to Christianity. The Portuguese slave trade had reduced the country to ruin. Dona Beatrice had a vision when she was ill and near death, that her country should be reborn free of the Europeans who brought misery through their slave trade. She gave the foreign religion an African personality, made Kongo the Holy Land, founded African Christianity, permitted polygamy, gave birth to a son claiming a virgin birth, thereby undermining the authority of the European Christians. Dona Beatrice was burned, with her son, to death.

Mwanthatisi of the Sotho (About 1781-1835) was appointed regent for her son (yet uncircumcised and sent to her people for his rites) when her husband died. The Zulu and wandering Bantu had lived harmoniously until the arrival of the European Boers whose desire for land suddenly made for short supply. A foreign army, sneaking behind her encampment as they slept gathered. She marshalled every woman, child and cattle, formed one long line and led them forward toward the enemy. They raised so much noise and dust the enemy believed they were facing an endless line of warriors, turned and fled. Mwanthanisi saved her people from certain massacre, became Queen Mother and adviser to her ruling son.

Ranavalona I of Madagascar (Ruled 1828-61).When Radama died in 1827 his wife Ranavalona, aged 40, became the ruler. Her first act was to put to death any claimant to the inheritance and declared herself king. Britain and France were informed that all treaties were ended and support for their religious teachings and industry withdrawn. For thirty years she kept foreigners at bay and kept her people's culture and traditions in tact. At her death the penetration of the French took hold. It was a hundred years before they would regain their independence.

Yaa Asantewaa of Asante (About 1840/60 - 1920) was queen mother, the paramount in woman's affairs and had a distinct voice in all public affairs. When Prempeh was forced to submit to the British government and exiled, Yaa Asantewaa, the queen mother became her people's leader. She hated the British for the way Prempeh and her son had been treated. The British governor demanded that the Golden Stool be surrendered so that he could sit upon it, which was against the religious and cultural customs of the people. Three days later the Yaa Asantewaa war began. They surrounded the British fort for two months; their food and ammunition ran out; they began to die or escape. The British declared war on the Asante, who fought long and hard, but eventually were captured. She spat in the face of the British officer who captured her, but she was exiled to Seychelles. Songs are still sung about her--the warrior with a gun and a sword. She is known as the power who saved the unity of her people.

Nehanda of Zimbabwe (About 1863-98). Resistance to foreign domination was led by Nehanda, originally named Chargwe. She was a spiritual leader, a prophet and medium who, when possessed by the spirit of the original Nehanda (the original Nehanda lived in the 15th Century), disappeared from a cliff after her father, a chief died and a brother committed incest to establish himself as the new ruler. Her spirit remains among her people, the Shona, in the form of a medium. When the medium dies the spirit wanders in the bush as a lion until a new medium is found. She and another medium declared war on the white invaders in 1896. The hated and cruel overlord, Pollard, worked as her servant and was later executed. They were able to regain control over most of their land. The British sent more troops and guns. Her partner surrendered but she continued to fight the bloody war. She was finally captured, tried and hanged April 27, 1898. The spirit of Nehanda was found in an old woman in 1972. She has became the medium and consultant to the warriors in the latest fight for independence which came April, 1980.

These are a few of the many warrior queens who assisted their people in fighting off colonial European invasions. Sweetman further confirms the importance, or in these cases, the predominance of matriarchical rule in ancient history (See Diop, 1987).

> It is helpful to remember that the most warlike and supposedly male-oriented societies sometimes had female rulers. The reason may be that if the leader is frequently away fighting he must leave his lands and possessions in charge of those he can trust, his nearest female kin. Ironically the rise of powerful

> male rulers often led to the establishment of a matrilineal system for, unwilling to introduce his wives' kin into the centre of power, the ruler preferred to see inheritance pass through his sister. Or again, in order to maintain his authority, the leader would take wives from each 'clan' in his group. Upon his death one of his sons would be chosen to succeed, with the boy's mother assuming a position of power as a counsellor to the new ruler (p. x).

Sweetman goes on to remind us when reading history of African people that the legendary first ancestor of the powerful male leaders was a woman. Like Diop he suggests that this indicates the existence of matriarchal societies. The theory known as the Golden Age of Matriarchy proposes that the earliest human societies were ruled by women as indicated by early female fertility gods. These were replaced by male warlike gods when men asserted themselves over the female rulers.

> There is no reason to interpret these myths as records of actual events or as a straightforward truthful account. It is more likely that such stories were meant to emphasize the fact that man had acquired a superior status *to* woman rather than implying that there had been a period of superior status *for* women. Looking at more recent times, historians have pointed out that many societies have a senior female figure as a sort of second-in-command to the head male, usually a queen-mother or royal sister and they claim that this is evidence that women have been displaced and pushed down from the leading position. . . . It is true that there is a remarkable similarity in the status of the queen-mother and king's-sister in many different societies across the whole of Africa (p. x).

By the time history has been recorded regularly we find men in superior positions but the stories about female rulers are some of the most extraordinary. Sweetman suggests that the heavy male bias of historians has led to the under-estimation of women and their significant historical roles. Clearly from the biographies known in the historical records, African women were warrior-queens and rulers extrodinaire.

Recommended Activities

Adult Discuss the concept of warrior in the African context and how his-story has changed her-story.

Youth Share biographies of African women warriors. (See Resources) Provide a framework for discussion of the concept of warrior in the African and African American context.

Have initiates study the life of a woman African warrior, provide costumes and a forum to present the information to others in the community.

<u>African American Women Warriors.</u> African women born in America, like their ancestors, have taken up the torch to battle when necessary. Some of these women include:

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883)--an abolitionist, orator and women's rights activist. She was born in slavery in New York she was sold many times and bore 5 children who were sold. She escaped and sought refuge with a Quaker family. A 6 foot tall woman with a thundering voice, acid quick tongue and the first woman to join the anti-slavery movement. She also fought for woman's suffrage and rights.

Ida B. Wells Barnett (1862-1931)--daughter of enslaved parents, born and reared to be strong and resourceful. She raised seven brothers and sisters after their parents died of Yellow Fever when she was 14. She became a teacher, writer, publisher and freedom fighter. She wrote the first book documenting the lynchings of Africans. She is a founder of the NAACP, fought for families that had their land stolen and was a woman who used the power of words to help her people.

Harriet Tubman (1820-1913)--one of the best known drivers on the Underground Railroad, assisting enslaved Africans to escape to the North. She was known as the conductor who never lost one of her 300 passengers in her 20 trips back and forth. She also served as a scout and spy for the Union Army during the Civil War and led a raid which resulted in freedom for 750 more enslaved persons. At one time there was a $40,000 reward for her capture.

Maggie Lena Walker (1867-1934)--financier and civil rights leader, the first American woman to establish and manage a bank. Born in Richmond, Va. where she attended school. At 14 she joined an organization whose mission was to administer to the sick and aged. She later became a banker and helped many African owned business to start and thrive. Her bank operates today as The Consolidated Bank and Trust Company, one of the oldest African owned and managed banks in America. Her home was established as a national historic site by U.S. Congress. She also worked with the NAACP and the National Negro Business League.

Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955)--outstanding educator and the first African American woman to start a school which became a four year accredited college. The daughter of former enslaved parents, who had 16 other children, she raised herself from the cotton fields of South Carolina, walked five miles daily to school to earn a scholarship to college and become a school teacher. Bethune College started with five girls who paid .50 cents a week in tuition. As a woman of great strength, courage and perseverance, she was highly respected and served as an advisor to Presidents of the United States.

Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954)--a champion of women's rights, a writer, lecturer and active demonstrator for equality. She was born in Memphis Tennessee, attended private schools, college receiving a B.A and masters degree. She was the first woman ever offered the position of a college registrar. But she refused the position, married the first Black judge of Washington, D.C. and had two daughters. She helped organize the Colored Womens League of Washington, D.C., assisted poor families and served on the D.C. Board of Education. As a fair colored woman she fought discrimination in public services--after being served in a whites only restaurant, she would demand service for others of her race. She headed a committee of distinguished African American citizens to enforce an 80 year old law requiring restaurants to serve "any respectable and well-behaved person." With the threat of losing their license she took this case to the Supreme Court. The court ruled in her favor in 1953.

Edmonia Lewis (1846-1890)--was a sculptor of international acclaim. She was extremely talented and able to capture strong feelings in her works. Her most famous piece is "Forever Free," a sculpture of a freedman getting his freedom. One fist is clenched, the other protecting his wife. She did a bust of John Brown, Charles Sumner and others. Her father was African and her mother was a native of the Americas. She was involved in the Underground Railroad and helped to organize one of the first African regiments to fight in the Civil War.

Ella Jo Baker (1903-1986)--SCLC Secretary, an early NCCAP worker, and known as the mother of SNCC, was a life long national and international civil rights activist. She was born of hard working parents in Norfolk, VA. who taught her Black values of sharing, community cooperation, racial pride and resistence to all forms of oppression. Her grandfather, a minister, community leader, civil rights activist passed his beliefs on to her. She is credited saying, "until the killing of Black men, Black mother's sons, is as important as the killing of white men, white mother's sons, we who believe in freedom cannot rest" (Estell, 1994).

For further discussion of the history of resistance in African American women, see Beal (1981) and Davis (1981). The summary of the African women's characteristics would historically define her as:

1. heroically resistant to the oppression of her people
2. a contributor to a wide variety of fields based on her gifts, skills and talents
3. the stabilizer for her family
4. the basis of the mutual aid and interdependent support system that was built for the survival of the African American community

5. served as the nurturing care taker for kin and non-kin children
6. maintainer of the traditional values and beliefs
7. adaptor and teacher of the survival values and behaviors

In summary, it is essential to look at societal and cultural expectations of African women. History shows us that African women, besides taking on the traditional female roles of mother and wife, was an independent yet interdependent person in her community's life. She was an economic provider for her family as well as taking leadership roles when necessary. African and African American women have been rulers, leaders, business women, wives, mothers and, last but not least, warriors for their people.

Recommended Activities

Adults Discuss the concept of warrior in the African American context.

Random Acts of Commitment--Select as individual and/or as a group some way to assist the community persevere toward freedom from oppression.

Youth Share biographies of African American women warriors. (See Resources) Provide a framework for discussion of the concept of warrior in the African and African American context.

Have initiates study the life of a woman African warrior, provide costumes and a forum to present the information to others in the community.

Provide a community service project which is consistent with the concept of helping our people.

Attend rallies, demonstrations, forums which address the issues of oppression and freedom for African Americans.

African Socialization Patterns

"Learning is for life, eating is for today"

The purpose of the socialization in any society is to teach the young appropriate roles and behaviors. The society's philosophy, values, traditions and deference are taught during the socialization period which begins at birth. Everything around a child teaches him/her how to think and behave. Children are not excluded from the life of the people so as they grow they observe and participate in all the formal rites of passage expected of them. Additionally, children are exposed to multiple parenting which further reinforces the community's values and customs.

Rites of Passage -- A rite is simply a ceremonial or customary series of acts marking some significant occasion. Passage means the act or process, transition or movement from place or condition to another. Therefore a working definition of Rites of Passage is simply a activity or celebration marking the successful transition from one life stage to another.

From a holistic perspective one must view the entire developmental life cycle (Warfield-Coppock, 1990) as a series of transitions or transformations. The African philosophical view of the life stages breaks them down into five distinct times of transition - birth, puberty, marriage, eldership and death. Since social relationships are the key in an African society, these stages are defined by the customary relationships expected of the person in the stage.

Birth is the transition from the spiritual world to the physical world. The new person is examined for traces of ancestors or other person known in past incarnation. Often the child is given the name of the person who he or she resembles either physically or spiritually. A celebration or rites marks the entrance of this new being into the midst of the community. The naming ceremony is the time when the community gathers to welcome the new or returned spirit to the physical plane.

Puberty is the next transition that a person makes in the developmental life cycle. From reading and observation of traditional African culture we know that the transition from childhood to adolescence is marked by a series of activities to instruct the young person in the responsibilities and privileges of adulthood and with a ceremony marking this passage. This is an important time, for no people can survive without responsible adult members in their community to carry out the many needs that the people may have.

Marriage is traditionally a very important stage as it is families which form the basis of a healthy, nurturant society. These families will raise children by means of the extended or two families joined by the marriage. So a marriage is not just two individuals joining, but two large extended families coming together. This very often offers more support to the young people who are now joined and at the same time offers less leeway to dissolve such a complex set of relationships, thereby established.

Eldership is a stage which is basically neglected in the Western cultures which venerate and glorify youth or staying young-looking The elders of any community have completed all previous activities and rites and have gained significant wisdom to reflectively offer assistance to the community in matters of maintaining harmony and balance. Very often these older members make up a Council of Elders which will hear and judge cases of conflict from community members and see to the continuation of the traditions of the society.

Death is the final rite of passage when the physical person returns to the spiritual world. Marked by a ritual of passing, the funeral is attended by the community in respect to the family of the departed. The person's life is reviewed and expressions of grief and release are expected. It is the strong belief that this being will remain in the community of ancestors until all persons who knew him/her while living have also passed. Ancestors are called upon by the living for help and guidance. The ancestor then moves to the community of spirits.

Elders and the gender specific secret societies usually took on the task of making final preparations for the child to join the adult status. Female secret societies became the final socializer for a young woman. They taught the finer details of becoming a woman and wife. During this period the values of interdependence and mutual aid were firmly planted, for the group that is initiated together became bonded and mutually interdependent for life.

African women were traditionally socialized, using multiple mothering techniques and secret women's societies. Secret societies have traditionally been charged with the management of the correct orientation of boys and girls as well as protecting and regulating the affairs of the community (Warfield-Coppock & Coppock, 1992). No person is considered greater than or superior to his or her group or community. Should any individual complete all rites and have superior knowledge, he or she would never have the knowledge of the other gender's secrets and society. Therefore, male and female secret societies were the counterbalance for the community.

West African socialization practices have been documented by the study of female secret societies. One of the largest and well-known of these societies is the Sande Society found among the Mende people, in the area known as Sierra Leone in West Africa. This international society of women, however, extends to other countries in Africa including Liberia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, and numerous ethnic groups. It is of utmost importance as it is a leader in the establishment of the feminine principle and presence in the art and culture of the people. The Bundu or Sowo mask has delicate, ideal, feminine features, and serves as not only a standard of beauty, but is the only mask worn regularly by African women.

> The Sande Society is ubiquitous in Mendeland--where there are women, there is Sande. Throughout a woman's lifetime Sande influences every aspect of her physical, psychological, and social development. Sande was there before she was born and remains when she is gone; it shapes a woman, influences her every thought and action, endows her with identity and personality. . . . Every

> Mende woman goes into the Sande Society--she goes because her mother sends her there, because her sisters and aunts are there, because it is the ruling, governing institution in a female's life. Mende women love Sande; they sing its praises; recite its virtues, dance in its honor. They treasure it, preserve its virtues, and pass it on to the next generation. In return, Sande is the guardian of the women: their spokesperson, shield, protector, battling to give women life space, power, health, love, fertility, self-expression. And, as it guards and cherishes the women, they in turn rally round it and hold its standards high (Boone, 1986, p. 15).

The African secret society enhances and maximizes the socialization of women. It takes them beyond a simple biological, and thus lower, level of self and community/gender definition. Girls grow, model, and develop best in the community of their female peers.

Recommended Activities

Adults Discuss the concept of socialization and how we use it to raise our daughters.

Discuss women's issues throughout the life cycle (Warfield-Coppock, 1990).

Share and discuss concepts of African socialization (Boone, 1986).

Youth Define rites of passage, discuss its concepts and meaning to African and African American people.

Review the stages of the life cycle and their meaning (Warfield-Coppock, 1990).

Share the concepts of sisterhood and socialization through activities.

African American Socialization Patterns

"The rooster crows, but the hen delivers"

Like African Americans in general, women of African descent are not a monolithic group. Many elements impact and influence their development, not the least of which are cultural, societal, and familial pressures. Ladner (1971) demonstrated that the African American girl, due to her cultural expectations, reaches womanhood earlier than her European counterparts and each girl is socialized by a variety of conditions including her role models, opportunities, psychological temperament, and the impact of value, customs and traditions of the African American community of which she is a part. Since culture is the basis of all thought, attitudes, and behavior (Warfield-Coppock, 1985), the socialization of a girl will take the influence of the society and culture.

Identifying the characteristics of girls that women may assist to womanhood is not an attempt to stereotype, but to recognize the complexity of the potential belief system, attitudes, and behaviors that we would find among our African American girls. There are many factors that will place a girl along the continuum of values. First is the importance placed by the nurturing parent(s) of giving and modeling for their daughter the values of their kinship line and the Black community in general. The mother, as a role model, for her daughter plays an important part of in determining the girl will believe and how she will behave.

According to Collins (1991), the mother-daughter relationship is key. Regardless, she suggests, of the social class, family backgrounds and structure and geographic regions, the message to daughters have similar themes. Mothers have the greatest influence in molding the woman to be. The closeness or level of intimacy maintained in this relationship over time will produce young women who follow the lead, or diverge from the path their mothers have established. "Othermothers," women who assist the bloodmother in raising her children, is a institution central to African motherhood. When a girl has several "other-mothers" she has an opportunity to get the best from each and blossom into a truly unique and competent woman.

Social learning theory, according to Collins (1991), provides rewards and punishments leading to a discovery of the female role. Black mothers reward some behaviors and punish others as they raise their daughters, thereby establishing an ideology of womanhood and motherhood. She further states that under patriarchical systems the mother-daughter connection is problematic because men are more valued than women. Therefore, girls identify with and reject their mothers as inferior beings, at the same time.

Strengthening and providing viable African woman centered female societies may well serve to enhance, not only the position of women in their communities, but the value placed on them as a whole. There is a balance that must be established and maintained between the personal female development and the role of nurturing and stabilizing the group.

African American female socialization comes from a long history of power and oppression. Currently female rites of passage is an African centered strategy used to guide girls to adulthood with positive cultural self concept and self esteem. These factors have enabled young women to resist self destructive behavior patterns including substance abuse, violence, and early sexual behavior leading to early pregnancies. Regardless of 'where' our girls are at the liminal period, we as adult women must seek to provide them with the social, cultural, and nurturing experiences needed to achieve full womanhood. Along the continuum of adopted values (Warfield-Coppock, 1994a) girls may be:

(1) African Centered. This girl has been raised in a secure, multi-parental situation which has given her a positive self concept based on her African heritage. One potential limitation in this girl is that she may be too sheltered by her family and community given the stark contrast in values of the larger society. If she has not been allowed a complete view of her environment, she may, when leaving her cocoon, swing to the other end of the pendulum and adapt or test non-productive values and behaviors of the 'other' society. The adults around her should seek ways to shore up her core values in relation to those of the larger society. First hand experience, particularly with travels to Africa, can give this girl a view of the larger world and help her understand how her values securely fit.

(2) Afrocentric Oriented. Coming from a largely positive Black experience, many of this girl's and family's values are based on unconscious attitudes or beliefs passed on through generations. Some of these are productive Afrocentric values and others are self and group doubting, negatives which are adopted from the oppressive values of the larger society. A major concern for this girl is her lack of knowledge of self and culture will cause her to turn her oppression inward and display anti or alien-self disorders. This girl needs lessons about the importance and value of African women, lest in her struggle to rise above group negatives she rejects African womanhood.

(3) Eurocentric. Raised in the context of the majority white society, this girl, like the African centered girl, is very sheltered but away from her natural cultural roots. Without a balanced view of her cultural roots she is likely to, like her white peers, devalue herself as a Black and as a woman. She may grow to be harsh and abusive to her own people, siding with and viewing Africans as whites do. This girl needs a balanced cultural view and appreciation of all people.

(4) Eurocentrically Oriented. Raised at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale, this girl, because of her severe disadvantage, including spiritual impoverishment, is most at risk for all kinds of internal and external abuse. She is at high risk for death by homicide, AIDS or other diseases, physical and sexual abuse or neglect, early pregnancy, inadequate parenting skills and poverty, substance abuse, educational failure and incarceration. Her greatest need is for a semi-permanent mentor or nurturing female model who is able to provide some of the security missing in her life. This mentorship relationship should focus on her spiritual enhancement, balancing her overwhelming focus on material needs and desires. (This group includes "Gangsta Girls").

Recommended Activities

Adults Select a peer group of girls, then assign one to each woman to mentor. Coordinate positive activities so that the girls can remain in their peer group but learn new attitudes, skills and practices.

Provide a rites of passage experience within the mentoring process.

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One does not need to look far to find African American women in the history books (Sterling, 1979; Empak Series 1984-89; Beal, 1981; Davis, 1981) for contributions/struggle of her people: Slavery Abolitionists/Freedom Fighters-Charlotte L. Forten, Sarah P. Redmond, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Fanny Lou Hammer, Ida B. Wells, Mary Elizabeth Bowser, Ellen Craft, Frances Watkins Harper, Mary Ellen Pleasant, Mary Church Terrell, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin Pharmacist - Ella Philips Stewart; Educators-Mary McLeod Bethune, Nanny Helen Burroughs, Mary Burnett Talbert; Gifted Vocalist - Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield; Journalists-Mary Shadd Cary Pioneers - Mary Green, Mary Fields, Clara Brown.
First Black Woman: Bessie Coleman-pilot; Crystal Bird Fauset-state legislator; Dr.Ida Gray-to earn Doctor of Dental Surgery; Mary Eliza Mahoney-professionally trained nurse; Nina Mae McKinney-motion picture star; Florence Smith Price-award winning composer; Dr. Susan McKinney Steward-to enter medical school and gain recognizable success; Madame C.J. Walker millionaire businesswoman; Maggie Lena Walker - first woman bank president .

Selected Media

One woman plays such as "Ain't I a woman"
Julia Dash's "Daughters of the Dust"

Chapter 3
African Womanhood Challenges

World Wide Oppression
Cultural World Views of Womanhood
African American Female Youth At Risk
Resources

*AYA (fern). Symbol of ENDURANCE, DEFIANCE AGAINST DIFFICULTIES, HARDINESS, PERSEVERANCE, INDEPENDENCE & RESOURCEFULNESS
(Ofori-Ansa, 1978, poster)

*ADINKRA SYMBOLS of the Akan People in the language of Twi. The Ghanaian people, of West Afrika, developed these symbols, and printed them on the sacred cloth made for royalty and spiritual leaders for the important and sacred rituals and ceremonies including the various rites of passage/initiation.

Chapter 3
African Womanhood Challenges

"Everything that touches your life must be an instrument of your liberation, or you must throw it into the trash can of history" --John Henrik Clark

Chapter Goals

1. Increase our understanding of world wide oppression, violence and its effects on the positive development of the young African female.

2. Increase our knowledge of the afrocentic and eurocentric views of womanhood.

3. Increase our understanding of the societal dangers and risks to young African American females based on our conditions of oppression and discrimination.

Introduction

Only fools limit their women.
The full potential of a nation
cannot be realized unless the
full potential of its women
is realized;
only fools limit their women
(Madhubuti, 1973, p. 53)

One of the highest principles of our most ancient culture--Kemet (Egypt), is the principle of Maat meaning truth, justice, righteousness, order, and harmony. The symbol of Maat is the shape of a woman kneeling (female energy) and the feather which is used to weigh (assessing truth and righteousness) the heart (justice)at the time of death. The ankh, the Kemetic symbol of life, symbolically represents both physical and eternal life (Amen, 1993). The shape of the ankh is consistent with the shape of the life giving female uterus and the adapted Akua doll of West Africa--a symbol of female fertility. The two arms that extend under the uterine shape are called the wings of Isis. If we recall the story of Osiris and Isis (Budge, 1967) we remember that Osiris was dismembered by the evil brother Set. It was Isis that travelled over the land and collected her brother/husband's parts to be reassembled. She used the powers and tools to resurrect him to eternal life. Amen (1993) provides a scientific discussion of the electromagnetic power of the ankh and further represents this important symbol and tool of the ancient priests associated with the link between wisdom and spirituality associated with Isis. To discover the truth of our ancient past and ancestry is to find the veracity, the force and value of women and the importance of the female energy.

There are numerous challenges confronting African females of all ages. Young females learn from their role models--older African women. Many topics must be studied and understood to provide a positive start for young females. We must understand global, societal and personal challenges in order to define and understand the reality of our situation. One of the most important but neglected areas is a clear understanding of womanhood and oppression. Rarely do our researchers, scholars, and teachers link the importance of freedom of African people to the freedom of women. Trickle down theory suggests that those persons at the bottom will be deluged with the products and debris of oppression. African women have clearly been at the bottom as victims of both racism (white supremacy) and sexism (an inherent characteristic of European culture).

Malcolm X reminded us the golden rule of African society requires that we must judge the condition of the community by the condition of the women. When women are participants in the the liberation struggle for her people, the entire community is a participant. When women are limited or do nothing in their struggle, the community is not involved (Mapfumo, 1994).

World Wide Oppression

"The person who fails to blacken ivory will try to bleach ebony"

Oppression and violence are two edges of the same sword. One cannot talk about oppression without a discussion of violence and vice versa. One of the most important contributions to this discourse is by psychologist Bulhan in his review of work of Martinque psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. Bulhan provides us with a framework with which to view the world wide oppression and violence connection.

Bulhan (1985) defines oppression as a "caldron" of violence embedded in social conditions. For example, sanctioned or legitimate violence is that which occurs from the top down. Those in power (law enforcement) maintain order through the threat or use of violence. Illegitimate violence is that which occurs from the bottom up. Vertical violence is that which is vented by victims of horizontal violence on their relatives or peers. A case in point is the situation of South Africa where legitimate violence has been perpetuated (by the white minority) on the victims of oppression (the Black majority). These victims have, in turn, turned their anger and frustration on their own people. Bulhan goes on to redefine violence from the perspective of the victim.

Bulhan defines three levels of human violence. Personal violence, the easiest to distinguish, is a dyad or one person against another. Two related forms of personal violence are interpersonal and intrapersonal violence. A higher order violence is the institutional type which occurs in mental institutions, prisons and the family. The third type, structural violence, is the most deadly and the hardest to detect. Institutional and structural violence span generations, are ingrained in the society where individuals are socialized as victims or perpetuators where they live and act on their prescribed roles. Structural violence is assumed to be the way of the world. It presents itself as race differential rates of morbidity and mortality, disease and premature death, family incomes, occupations and unemployment rates, patterns of arrest, incarceration and executions, auto-destructive reactions of alcoholism, drug abuse, homicide, "accidents", victim precipitated homicides, suicides and excessive psychological stress and breakdowns. In other words, Blacks and people of color have higher rates of death and disease than whites, poorer health and living conditions, lower incomes, the most dangerous jobs, the highest patterns of arrests with the most severe penalties, and the worst self destructive behaviors i.e. drug use, vertical violence, etc.

As examples of this, we can look at statistics among people of color in the United States and the more blatant conditions of South African Blacks. It is also found in an analysis of the separation of Nelson Mandela from the woman who waited for him, kept the struggle of the people alive and was ultimately responsible for freeing her man from prison after 26 years. Her own incarceration and determination is record. Whether or not she was guilty of assault (illegitimate violence in the eyes of the "legitimate" government of South Africa) while her people were at war with the whites, she will have to live with the character assassination of the white media. Her continuing importance to the country is reflected in her appointment in the cabinet of the new South African government.

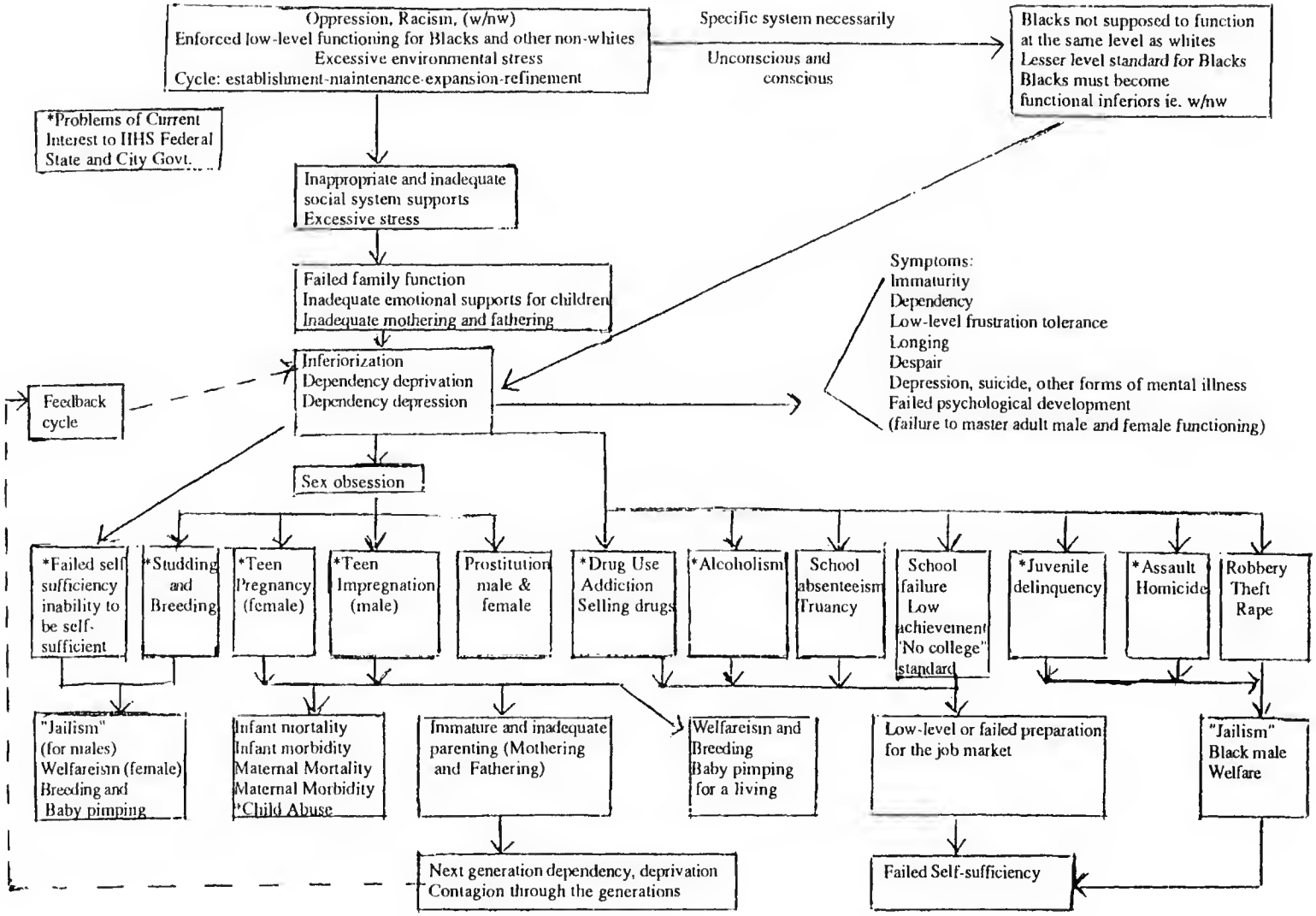
Frances Cress-Welsing (1991) has offered the most comprehensive and thorough explanation of global oppression/racism otherwise known as white supremacy. Figure 3.1 shows the direct link of racism to the issues teenage pregnancy (female), teen impregnation (male) resulting in inadequate parenting and the vicious cycle of continued poverty and oppression.

Recommended Activities

Adults Discuss the Cress-Welsing theory of white supremacy and Bulhan's concept of violence.

Youth Prepare a lesson based on this information and research. Include a video like "Sarafina" (South Africa) for discussion of world-wide oppression and violence.

Figure 3.1 Etiology: Dynamic Causation of Black "Teen Pregnancy-Teen Impregnation" and Other Dependency Deprivation Syndromes



From Cress Welsing, (1991, p. iii)

Matriarchy and Patriarchy. Some of the evidence of ancient female power is found in the work of Diop on the African matrilineal ancestry. Africans refer to their homeland as the "motherland" while Europeans call their origins--Europe--the "fatherland." Sexism in current and contemporary American society has developed, in part, as a result of the eurocentric concepts of the world order. A study of the beginnings of male and female leadership will impact views of how girls are socialized and what roles they will play in societies. The seminal piece on the origins of this discussion comes from Senegalese researcher and writer Cheikh Anta Diop. His two cradle theory has served to clarify roles and responsibilities of women in the historical eras of humankind. Matrilineal African culture is evidence again of the importance of women throughout the ancestry of African people.

Diop (Wobogo, 1976) suggests that there were in fact two simultaneous cradles of civilization. They are summarized in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1

Two Cradle--Matriarchy and Patriarchy--Theory

Components	Southern Cradle	Northern Cradle
Geographical	Africa and Southern Asia	Eurasia
Economy/Life-Style	Agrarian	Nomadic/hostile to crops
Social/Kinship	Female attributes, promoted cooperative,non-competitive, social harmony	Male/Masculine attributes, ie competitive, combativeness, individuality
Dominant Role	Female/Maternal in cultivation intimate relationship with nature	Male/Masculine attributes needed in herding, hunting, raiding and fighting
Other Role	Men as protectors	Women relegated to procreative and domestic chores
Descent	Matrilineal	Patrilineal
Relations to External Collectivism	Xenophilic (love of strangers)	Xenophobic (fear of strangers) & ethnocentric

The Southern Cradle covering the areas of Africa were largely agrarian, depending on the female to produce and cultivate the land, crops and staples for the survival of the people. The social organization was not only female-centered, but matrilineal, tracing the lineage of children through the mother's kinship line. These societies promoted harmony and collectivism. The balance of the male and female roles and responsibilities served to provide each member of the group with basic and higher needs.

As the culture of the Northern Cradle, which was combative and patrilineal invaded Africa, the co-mingling of the cultures changed. Gender roles and power relationship. Women were relegated to procreative and domestic chores and became less valued in the male dominated and oriented culture.

Steady (1981) reminds us of the cross cultural unifying themes of all Black women. First, their common African heritage has been described by women of color over the globe. Many writers have focused on Africa and the primary migration in the African diaspora notably the Caribbean, South America, and the United States. However, there are writings about the conditions of

African women and living under domination, like Emecheta's 1974 novel about the life of a Nigerian woman in England. Europe is considered a secondary stage of migration.

The African woman's economic exploitation and marginalization is another unifying theme. Closely linked to economic exploitation of the African woman is sexual exploitation and harassment which survives from the times of enslavement of Africans from the continent. The majority of women of color in the diaspora, then, are the descendents of enslaved Africans (Steady, 1981). Closely linked with the exploitation of African women have been negative stereotypes in literature, the media, and society in general. Women of color are often characterized as sensuous sex objects, with loose morals, or to the other extreme, career minded with psychological and family problems. The African woman's fertility during slavery was exploited to produce cheap labor. Now her fertility, considered unprofitable, has become the target of "family planning" programs and she has become the victim of pills, devices, or sterilization, without informed consent.

An additional theme unifying African women is that of self-reliance as an ideology which varies by situational economic context. Traditionally, African women contributed to their society's economy with contributions to their family and horticultural or agricultural activities. This "food power" gave African women some autonomy and leverage in their relationship to others, particularly men. As oppressive as polygamy has been publicized, Steady (1981) reminds us that women in a polygamous household often had more autonomy than those in monogamous households. Patriarchal authority could not be exercised over all women continuously since the man shared his time between his wives and their children. The double standard of morality was different as well. It was more acceptable for a wife in a polygamous marriage to have lovers than the monogamously married woman.

While the eurocentrically conceived oppression of Black women has come from racism, sexism, and classism, it has not always been this way. Current challenges and problems between the genders are partially a result of adopting foreign and negative ways of viewing women and their roles. Another point that should be addressed in framing our look at male female relationships is that we are still battling the internalization of the white eurocentric and western values, such as those listed below.

Recommended Activities

Adults Discuss Diop's Two Cradle Theory as it establishes economic and gender relationships.

Youth Prepare a lesson based on this information and other research. Include movies or videos to enhance understanding of these concepts.

Discuss the differences in lineage in the patri- and matri-archial kinship style. Include information on African households (Surdakasa).

Cultural World Views of Womanhood

"The person who would ride two camels falls between them"

Cultural World Views of Womanhood. The table below provides us with a quick reference and reminder of the world view and values that have been indoctrinated into the American people through its institutions, particularly the mandatory public educational system and provides a perspective of the traditional African view of women and the eurocentric way of viewing females. One concept that we should not forget is that of the defense mechanisms that so often appear in the development of oppressive strategies and stereotypes. Men who fear women and their power will always attempt to make them feel powerless and inferior. Control of women's behavior has been the ultimate insult to those who understand harmony and balance.

Table 3.2 Defining Womanhood from Two World Views

Afrocentric World View	Eurocentric World View
Creator has both gender identifications	God is the Father/a male image
Women are the progenitors of humankind	Women provide offspring for men
An African woman was the "Eve"	Adam created first; Eve, a by-product of Adam created for his needs; both are white
Women are inherently equal	Women are inferior to men
Women are magical/revered	Women are devious and deceptive
Women belong to their family	Women belong to a man (father or husband)
Survival of the group	Survival of the fittest
Women are strong and resilient	Women are weak and delicate
Women and men are partners	Men are the superior partners
Egalitarian familial relationships	Women serve men in his home
Women and men have flexible roles	A woman's place in in the home
Beauty is in character and virtue	Beauty is based on a physical standard
Attractiveness is in full features and many colors including ebony skin, hair, and eyes	Attractiveness is in white/light (absence of) color skin, blond, long hair, blue/light eyes
Smart women are appealing	Smart women are a turn-off
Womanhood is the nurturing, caring, female who is self sufficient and gives back to her community	Womanhood is based on age and producing children
Power is in influence and responsibility	Women do not need power -- they need only support power of their men
Spirituality and vision come naturally to to women	Women's spirituality is used for evil Men should lead in religion/spirituality
Only fools limit their women	Women (like children) need guidance and restrictions
Women can share the men in their lives	Women should compete to be the only one in their man's life, even if it is only in name
Sisterhood and brotherhood (same gender peers) are the core kinship relationships	The husband wife relationship is the core kinship relationship

(Adapted from Hsu, 1970; Madhubuti, 1973; Perkins, 1992; Warfield-Coppock, 1990)

Recommended Activities

Adults Review the table showing womanhood from two world views and discuss how these have affected relationships with others.

Youth Discuss cultural world views and perspectives. Analyze this chart using examples from the youths' experiences.

Myths and Stereotypes of Women

Enslaved African women were subjected to the public physical exposure, violence including the horror of rape, raising and caring for the enslavers' family and children to the detriment of their own, extreme physical hardship and field work-even while pregnant, rapid baby production, and family instability - removing (selling) mates and children away from them. This history has given way to not only some changes in the traditions and behaviors which were carried here, but myths and stereotypes about the formerly enslaved African American women. These myths and stereotypes serve to limit or proscribe current and future generations to second class citizenship both as individuals and as a group. These stereotypes ultimately limit all African Americans.

Myth 1: The African American woman is oversexed.
In part this stereotype comes as a result of men attempting to justify their abuse of the enslaved African woman. The stereotype is continued to this day with the placement of characters such as "Jackee" on prime time television. Fortunately, the show "222" is balanced with one down to earth African American female who has a stable nuclear family. The other African American females are questionable - the silly older woman raising her grandson and the single, lonely, frustrated landlady-obviously so because she is not promiscuous as is "Jackee" who has too many men to count. The fact is that African Americans tend to be comfortable with their sexuality as it is only a part of life, an attitude carried over from their ancestors. They tend not to be "kinky" and use sex to sell everything from toys to cars. (See Campbell, 1989; King, 1973).

Myth 2: African American women are baby machines.
This stereotype holds that African American women are a drain on the welfare system as they continue to have baby after baby without regard to how they will be cared for. African Americans do have a reverence for life, a value inherited from their homeland, and are much less likely to get an abortion for an unplanned pregnancy. Actual statistic show that Whites in America receive more of the social welfare dollars than do African Americans. And then of course we do not call bailing out the Chrysler Corporation and the financially and morally bankrupt Savings and Loan system welfare, although it is clearly subsidizing these institutions at public expense.

Myth 3: African American women are asexual mammies.
Treated as a surrogate mothers for the enslavers' white children, African American women, particularly older women, have maintained the position of nurturing wet nurses for the delicate, pampered white female. Particularly in the South where Black and White roles are very ordered, the American of European descent has affectionate but paternalistic feelings toward the older African American female. Called "Auntie" she continues to survive the harsh realities of the capitalist system by serving as maid and housekeeper to the ruling class. The African belief by its women that children come first was transposed to support the enslaver lifestyle. Remember the picture on the box of Aunt Jemimah Pancake Mix?

Myth 4: African American women are dominating and castrating.
This stereotype, in many ways is the result of the imbalance forced upon the African American male and female as a result of oppression. In traditional settings Africans had clear roles and expectations of each other. This has not been true under America's oppressive system. Europeans define womanhood as passive and subordinate. Using this definition, African American women would appear to be dominant while merely continuing the legacy of independence and self sufficiency. Because families could be broken up at the enslaver's whim women have always been required to serve as stabilizers to the family. The concept of castration, too, is a European concept regardless of who uses the label. African American women have never had a reason to psychologically castrate their men. Suppressing African American men for economic, and fear of sexual value, while elevating the female to appear superior to men has historically been the white oppressor's mechanism to de-stabilize the strength of the African American male-female unit. McCray (1980) reminds us that the African American family is a

more balanced, flexible, functional, and stable unit than mainstream American families where roles are strictly designated. Staples (1973) states that if an African American man, because of illness or disability, loses his job he is much less likely to suffer emotional damage than his white counterpart. The woman can act as provider for the family as the harsh societal realities make societally determined rigid role prescriptions unrealistic and inapplicable.

Recommended Activities

Adults Discuss the myths and stereotypes that are found in our currently popular culture--media, movies, especially TV sitcoms.

Review the work of K. Sue Jewell on images of African American women. (From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond).

Discuss the poem "half steppin . . . " as a basis of values clarification.

Youth Watch a TV sitcom like "Living Single" and assess through discussion:
the stereotypes and myths perpetuated about Black women,
the cultural traps and values portrayed in the popular media,
history from different cultural perspectives.

Discuss how to address these stereotypes when they are found.

Discuss the poem "half steppin . . . " as a basis of values clarification.

American American Female At Risk

"War does not have one good child"

When a people are fighting for survival there are many casualties. Some of our tragedies "look like" personal or group deficiencies. A closer review of the grim statistics related to our female population reveals evidence of structural and institutional oppression. The African American female embodies the tradition of her African grandmothers as well as the doctrine of her enslaved foremothers. A look at the situation of the African American female in current day American society, reveals some startling results. Psychologist and researcher Gayle Porter (1992) has collected pertinent statistics that relate to the at-risk status of African American girls. Using self-report and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) data, Porter reports:

African American females, ages 5 to 24, are 10 times more likely than white girls in this age category to be victims of crime including assault, robbery and rape. They are 5 times more likely than their white counterparts to be murdered. Homicide is the number 1 cause of death among Black females except in the states of New York and New Jersey where it is AIDS. Homicide is number 2 in these states. While African American females are 14% of the population, they are 50% of the incarcerated population in this age category.

Additionally, this group has 50% of the diagnosed cases of AIDS which is 2 to 1 in comparison to white girls. Comparing Black and white females, African American females die of AIDS at a rate 4 to 1 in the 5-14 year range and more than 5 times the death rate in the 15 to 24 age category. Sixty percent of our girls in this age range report being sexually active. Twenty percent report four or more partners, but only 37% report semi-regular condom use. The risk of pregnancy and contracting AIDS and other STDs is higher among these girls who do not regularly require condoms use by their mates.

In comparison to white infants, when African American infants have babies they are 3 to 4 times more likely to die and in some states 9 times as likely. Black teen mothers are twice as likely to die in child birth as white teen mothers.

As reflected in self report data, Black females have worse mental health than their white counterparts. They are 4 times as likely to report anxiety and 3 times as likely to report depression. Suicide attempts are becoming more prevalent among African American females as well. Porter (1992) attributes the declining mental health to the high stress environments with gangs, killing, guns, and shootings in African American communities.

Finally, in the area of education 15% of our girls drop out of high school and are suspended at a rate three times that of white girls. Thirteen percent of our girls get to college, but only 7% of them complete college in five years or less. This is compared to 82% of white girls going to college and 88% completing college.

It is clear that in many ways the young African American female is at high risk for death, disease, early motherhood, abuse, mental illness and incomplete socialization. The seriousness of this issue cannot be overstated. While the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan, other governmental and Black community leaders place a clarion call on the endangered Black male, our girls are dying, but are also responsible for raising the community's children without the social, emotional, familial, educational, and financial resources required. Government funding has spawned this continued separation by claiming the African American male at risk, providing and encouraging funding for male based/conceived programs. The violence of males may be more obvious, but more insidious is the violence perpetuated against the less empowered female and community. This separation of the "at-risk" categories provides further alienation of members of African American communities who would normally and naturally be allies.

Recommended Activities

Adults

Collect data on the female population in your area. Identify the at-risk groups in your community then provide community forums on issues relevant to this population.

Use the article "gangsta girls" as a basis for discussion of the at risk girls in your community.

Discuss the Cress-Welsing concepts of Welfareism, Jailism and Baby Pimping.

Youth

Familiarize females with the at-risk statistics as a basis for discussion of goals and future plans.

Discuss the song by Patti Labelle, "Yo Mista--How's Your Daughter"

Resources

Selected Readings

*Abner, A. (July, 1994). Gangsta girls. Essence Magazine.
*Bulhan, H.A. (1985). Frantz Fanon and the psychology of oppression.
*Cress-Welsing, F. (1991). The Isis papers: The keys to the colors.
*Dolphyne, F.A. (1991). The emancipation of women: An African perspective.
*Emecheta, B. (1974). Second class citizen.
*Evans, M. "I am Black woman.
*Gordon, V. V. (1987). Black women feminism and Black liberation: Which way?
*Garvey, A.J. The philosophy and opinions of Marcus Garvey . . .
*Jewell, S.K. (1993). From mammy to miss america and beyond: Cultural images and the shaping of US social policy.
*Mataka, L. (1994). Restoring the queen.
Nobles, W.W., et al. (1987). The culture of drugs in the Black community.
Obenga, W. Ancient Egypt and Black Africa.
*Steady, F. C. (1989). African feminism: A worldwide perspective. In Terborg-Penn, R., S.
*Harley & A.B. Rushing, (Eds), Women in Africa and the African diaspora.
*Sudarkasa, N. (1989). The "status of women" in indigenous African societies. In Terborg-
*Penn, R., S. Harley & A. B. Rushing, (Eds), Women in Africa and the African diaspora.

*Van Sertima, I. (Ed.) (1988). Black women in antiquity (Revised): Chapters:
*Redd, D. "Black Madonnas of Europe: Diffusion of the African Isis"
*Sanchez, S. "Nefertiti: Queen to a sacred nation"
*Vanzant, I. (1992). Tapping the power within: A path to self-empowerment for Black women.
*Warfield-Coppock, N. (1990). Afrocentric theory and applications, Volume 1: Adolescent rites of passage.

Selected Videos/Movies/Music

"Sarafina"
Julia Dash's "Daughters of the Dust"
Patti Labelle's song "Yo Mista--How's Your Daughter"

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half steppin thru history by Laini Mataka

when i first started studying our history
i wld read about slavery & say in conversation
"i cldnt have been a slave.
they'd have had to kill me."
and whoever i was talkin with wld readily agree.

yet here we are!

here we are
bound & gagged right here
in this sophisticatedly decadent,
blood-sucking center of the universe,
wearing $165 tennis-shoes
marching for gay rights,
and talkin bout what we wldnt have tolerated
believing even that had we been slaves,
we wld have been haughtier,
more insolent, meaner,
more oblivious to pain,
stone-cold in bearing the lash.
we think we wldve sucked our teeth,
thrown curses with our eyes,
& fought to the death rather than be sold!

bullshit.

we'd have made the same moves then that we do now.

wite people use behavior-altering drugs
on our male children so they'll be submissive in
school and even more submissive
when it comes to defending the race.

and we take it.
wite people bring drugs into our community
as if they were takin food to a starvin nation.

and we take it.

wite people test automatic weapons
by selling them to us to exterminate each otha.
and we take it.

they pay us the least & charge us the most
for everything & then
tax us when we buy something
& use the taxes to help everybody but us.

and we take it.

they kill us when they feel like it.
and they feel like it alot.

and we take it.

so we shld just shut-up about slavery
& address the hell we're descending deeper into
right now.
& if we're not willing to die to liberate ourselves now
we wldnt have died
to escape slavery then, either.

we do our ancestors an un-fathomable injustice
when we claim that we wldve handled slavery
differently, better.

we suggest that they were
less than strong, somehow, not as defiant as we.
right now we cant even defy gravity
w / out ignorance holding onto our feet.

everytime one of our ancestors
lowered her or his head, and lived.
that same heart-swallowing gesture
turned into a rung on a ladder
that one of us climbed to reach the future.
their tears were the jewels we hocked
to help pay for our freedom.
and their whip marks were molded into the muscle
that we have yet to adequately use
to deliver ourselves from 20th century,
scientific bondage.

if we dont do the dynamic dees
that will honor & vindicate our ancestors
. . . if we dont beat the devil back
into his frozen hell. . . our grandchildren's children
will be sitting around idly
talking about what they wldve done
had they been in our shoes.

if we dont snatch our souls from the jaws of the beast
no libations will be poured in our memory
our names will not be written in the halls of forever
and like the sahara
the sands of time will bury us
and claim we never existed. (Mataka, 1994, pp. 100-103)

Chapter 4
Initiation of African Females

Training Concepts for African Womanhood
Core Curriculum for Womanhood Training
Auxiliary Curriculum
Expected Outcome from Training in African Womanhood
Resources

FEMALE CHI WARA. The feminine ancestral spirit with the young on its back.
The antelope's power, majesty and grace are represented in the Chi Wara.
The headdresses are from the Bambara People
who organized their life and religion around agriculture.
The Male Chi Wara is larger than the female and usually has
geometric designs carved into the horns.
The doe has straight horns and carries her fawn on her back.
Rituals were performed to bring abundant crops.
The Chi Wara was sent to their ancestors by the
Creator in the form of an antelope to teach them how to
cultivate sorghum (a cereal grain).
The Chi Wara's spirit is honored with every planting season.
(Kerina, 1970)

Chapter 4
Initiation of African Females

"Let the circle be unbroken"

Chapter Goals

1. Increase understanding of how to train young females in the concepts of African womanhood.

2. Increase knowledge and understanding of a core curriculum for womanhood training focusing on the development of women warriors.

3. Increase knowledge and understanding of auxiliary curriculum for the development of women's roles as mother, wife/mate, and family provider.

4. Increase knowledge and understanding of the expected outcomes from training in African womanhood.

Introduction

The substance and mental attitude of a nation
can be seen in its women, in the way they act
and move throughout the nation being productive.
if the women have nothing to do it reflects
what the nation is not doing.
if the women have substance and are given responsible positions
the nation has substance and is responsible
(Madhubuti, 1974, p. 54).

As Mwalimu Kwame Nkrumah said, "The degree of a country's revolutionary awareness may be measured by the political maturity of its women." This chapter will provide more specific information on moving toward the preparation for, development of, implementation and follow through on the actual initiation rites for the female of African descent. For additional information the readers is referred to Warfield-Coppock, 1990; Moore, et al. 1987; Warfield-Coppock & Coppock, 1992; Hill, 1992; Perkins, 1986, 1992.

Training Concepts for African Womanhood

Training is not the same as teaching. Children, youth and adults attend school regularly and are instructed using standard education methods. Rites of passage training should not mimic school. Training should provide an opportunity to use all of one's senses and both sides of the brain. Human beings generally have a preferred learning style--or they tend to comprehend and learn better using one of our many senses--visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, olfactory. Left brain activity is school-like academic and intellectual work. Right brain activity is the artistic, meditative, creative side. Additionally, some learners need reinforcement using a different sense or brain side. The idea, then, to provide the best possible training and learning environment is to create a variety of activities that will provide people with all learning styles the opportunity to absorb all the important information.

The use of ritual and ceremony is critical to transformation from one stage to another. Not only does ritual mark an event as different from ordinary life, but it prepares the spirit for new areas of advancement. Each female/woman should approach their initiation with an attitude of humility, reverence and peace. Fasting and meditation/prayer may assist in this effort. One's progress in spiritual enlightenment will be commensurate with the efforts put into the activity. Rituals have also been known to catapult one into a sense level or at least reinforce the new learning. Ritual and ceremony, therefore, should be interwoven with the curriculum.

One of the most important things we must remember is that our girls will model our attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. WOMEN/SISTERS--DO NOT EXPECT THE INITIATES TO DO ANYTHING, WEAR ANYTHING, OR EAT/NOT EAT ANYTHING THAT YOU ARE NOT WILLING TO DO YOURSELF. YOUR MESSAGE TO THEM, WILL NOT ONLY BE CONTRADICTORY, BUT HIPPOCRITICAL AND OF NO VALUE TO THEM OR THE GROUP. The best way to teach them new attitudes and behaviors is to live it along with them. To teach values of respect, discipline, responsibility, reciprocity, harmony--show them, don't tell them, how it is done.

Core Curriculum for Womanhood Training

The first published and widely distributed comprehensive core curriculum for the female rites of passage was completed by a group of four women who had just implemented the adolescent rites for their five daughters in 1986. Mafori Moore, Gwen Akua Gilyard, Karen King McCreary, (from New York City) and Nsenga Warfield-Coppock (of Washington, D.C.) directed the initiation for their daughters Akousa, Tulani, Bamidele, Temidayo, and Akua after 7 months of preparation in Family History, Sex Education, Spirituality, History of Our People, Values Clarification, Time Management and Organization Skills, Housekeeping and Finances, Taking Care of Self, Assertiveness and Leadership, the Arts and Dance. The resulting text Transformation: A Rites of Passage Manual for African-American Girls (Moore, et al., 1987) has become one the most important and most utilized guides for developing the rites experience for adolescents all over the United States. Following its publication and distribution,
0 many communities sought opportunities to guide their young females and males (men modified the goals and objectives to suit young male development) through the turbulent and trying adolescent years with positive activities, values and models.

Over the years additional information and elements have been included in the rites process. These warrior-healer focused components include:

Basic Components of the Rites of Passage Process

- Orientation/Induction (private and public)
- Core Curriculum Areas
    1. Sisterhood and Women's Secret Societies
    2. Spirituality, Ritual and Ceremony
    3. Personal Identity and Self Development
    4. Motherhood and Family
    5. Nutrition, Health and Healing
    6. Virtues and Values Clarification
    7. The Arts, Dance
    8. Cultural Ideology and History including Women's Contributions
    9. African and African American Womanhood and Roles
    10. Housekeeping, Resources and Finances
    11. Leadership, Assertiveness and Time Management
    12. Physical Development
- Separation/Rebirth
- Council of Elders/Advisors
- Assessment of Completion
- Rituals and Ceremony (private and public)
- Women's Collectives--Post Rites Activities or Continued Involvement

As we advance our knowledge of the rites and needs of women and young females in our society, we look toward providing a socialization that has a political ideology which can impart direction for the young warriors--female and male. This core curriculum has focused on the development of young females into warriors needed for an empowered community. These females will be

capable of carrying out the many roles that traditionally endowed African descent females. The core curriculum, then, focuses on the collective, spiritual, and political growth of women.

The auxiliary curriculum, briefly reflected here, contains additional recommended materials needed to fulfill the roles of mother, wife/mate and family provider. These roles are discussed conceptually in the core curriculum. They are separated because there has already been competent work accomplished in the latter of these areas in the work by Moore et al. (1987). In this auxiliary section there are specific recommendations and referrals to important resources.

Core Curriculum

This review and summary of the topics, goals, objectives and recommended activities that are found in the first three sections of this manual. These are only recommendations for a core curriculum. The best way to use this information is to discuss areas of need for your group and/or the needs of your adolescent initiates. Once this is determined the design and process of your rites of passage/initiation can be engaged using materials presented here and from your own research.

Chapter 1 Womanhood Collectives and Sisterhood

A perspective of African people's collective challenge and cure is offered as a the framework for understanding the need for respiritualization, following in the footsteps of our ancestors and reclaiming our cultural heritage. This chapter is designed to assist adult women to prepare themselves for the work of initiation and a rite of passage. The framework for our global recovery is viewed as a combined effort for personal and collective growth and development. The experience and skill gathered from the information and exercises of this chapter, including the use of rituals and ceremonies, can be parlayed into the preparation needed to provide the rites for adolescents.

Expected Outcomes

- Bonding of members as a result of interpersonal sharing over time
- Assessment of common issues
- Raise political consciousness with an understanding of needed women warrior-healers
- Providing support and advise to sisters
- Increased individual and group insights
- Assess appropriate tasks for youth based on the group's process and passage

Chapter 2 Concepts of African Womanhood

This chapter is included to provide females of African descent a realistic view of the positive contributions made by African women to global civilization. A knowledge of African descent women's traditional roles provides a framework and model for planning one's life goals and lifestyle. The development of African women as warriors (or fighting for the rights and causes of her people) is one of the most important but most forgotten roles in the rites process. The traditional socialization practices of African and African American women are also reviewed to provide a framework for the development of positive sisterhoods.

Expected Outcomes

- Bonding through exercises and discussion of issues
- Assessment of common issues
- Improved self concept based on correct, compelling and affirming information
- Improved ability to plan and seek directions for the enhancement of the universal goals of African people
- Increased individual and group insights
- Learn and memorize the attributes of specific female ancestors
- Learn and analyze the warrior traits found among women of African descent
- Assess appropriate subjects and tasks for youth based on the group's process and passage

Chapter 3 African Womanhood Challenges

This core curriculum section is designed to provide the African female with an understanding of problems or challenges that are partially a result of the system of global oppression, violence and its effects on the positive development of the young African female (and males). As the main care givers and models for young African American females we must understand the dangers ahead of daughters and seek solutions within our collectives. This section provides us with data and a framework to move toward the positive development of all African descent females.

Expected Outcomes

- Bonding through group exercises
- Assessment of common issues and experiences with racism and sexism
- Providing support and advise to sisters on personal and societal challenges
- Increased individual and group insights in the ways that oppression remains active
- Improved understanding of the societal dangers and risks to young African American females based on our conditions of oppression and discrimination
- Raise political consciousness relating to the global struggle against white supremacy
- Assess appropriate information and tasks for youth

Auxiliary Curriculum

Additional areas of study toward womanhood with specific suggestions are organized as a general topic of womanhood and under the major women's roles-- mother/wife/family provider.

Womanhood

Femininity and Personal Identity (See Rites Story)

- Personal Care and Hygiene (See Moore et al., 1987, p. 28)
  - Nutrition
  - Exercise
  - Hair and Nail care
  - Sewing, dress, clothing, and cosmetics
- Social Skills, Etiquette, and Home Entertaining (ibid. p. 28)
- Self-Defense and Safety: Unfortunately, the abuse of women and young females is ramped in this society. Women must teach girls respect for self and appropriate expectations of males. Young female children should be carefully watched to avoid transgression of sexual or physical abuse from family, caretakers, and other relatives or friends. Recent studies show that 50% of females abused are under the age of eighteen and 46% of this abuse is by a family member. With age, youth should be given expectations of male peers and disrespect of media's portrayal of women especially in music videos--the degrading of young females. Safety precautions include weapons, traveling in one's neighborhood, and approaches by men and conspiring women on the streets.
- Sex Education (ibid. p. 26)
  - HIV/AIDS and other STD's
  - Rose (1994)
- Arts and Dance (ibid. p. 31)
- Resources
  - *Self Defense Manuevers--The Oprah Winfrey Show
  - *Moore, M., et al. (1987) Transformation: A Rites of Passage Manual for African American Girls
  - *Community African Dance Group
  - *Community Martial Arts and Self-Defense Classes for women

Mother

Child bearing/ Child rearing

Health, Nutrition, Exercise, Diet

Developmental Stages/Discipline

Child Care

Medicinal Care/Wholistic Health/Natural Remedies

Resources

*Moore, M., et al., 1987, Transformation: A Rites of Passage Manual for African American Girls Transformation:

*Black Women's Health Collective.Books and film.

*Afua, Q. (1992). Heal thyself: For health and longevity

Wife/Helpmate

Household Manager (See Moore, et al. p. 29)

Homemaker

meal planning and grocery shopping

cooking

sewing/mending

cleaning

organizing skill

Budgeting Household

Organizing finances, managing money, financial investments

Home Decor/Decorating/Seasonal Decor:

Resources

*Moore, M., et al., 1987, Transformation: A Rites of Passage Manual for African American Girls

*Books on Kwanzaa

*African Cooking

*Sewing classes

Family Provider

Mental health/emotional needs of family

Family history

Extended family relationships

Family rituals and celebrations

Economic Provider

Resources

*Blockson, C. (1977). Black genealogy.

*Gray, M.E. (1988). Images: A workbook for enhancing self-esteem and promoting career preparation, especially for Black girls.

*Hilliard, A.G. (1993). Fifty plus essential references on the history of African people.

*Karenga, M. (1984). Selections from The Husia: Sacred wisdom of ancient Egypt.

*Karenga, M. (1990). The book of coming forth by day.

*Moore, M. et al.(1987) Transformation: A Rites of Passage Manual for African American Girls.

*Provenzo, E.F., Provenzo, A.S., & P.A. Zorn. (1984). Pursuing the past: Oral history

Expected Outcomes from Training in African Womanhood

"The day one sets out on a journey is not the day to begin preparation"

The outcomes of a womanhood training will clearly depend on the inputs. Conceptualizing and concrete planning should precede implementation. This may be a wide compendium of skills and talents as well as spiritual enrichment. An ancient saying applies here; "If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there." Plan in advance what you want to have at the end. Some resources that may be considered in your pre-planning include:

The definition of an African Woman in the introduction of the text
Haki Madhubuti's--Maximum Cultural Development (See Warfield-Coppock, 1990)
Moore, et al. Transformation: A Rites of Passage Manual for African American Girls
Perkin's--Liberating Tasks (1986)
Warfield-Coppock's Developmental Tasks (1990)
Warfield-Coppock & Coppock's traditional initiation stages (1992)

Finally, some outcomes may not be completely tangible but rather obscure--nonetheless important and appealing. There is the wise Zulu story retold by Luke (1987) which provides us with a view of the desirable characteristics of an African woman. This rites of passage story suggests that for the female, the time of rites is one of choice and ultimately the chance for full blooming or languishing in the mire of mediocrity.

> This story is about a group of African girls who are preparing for their rites of passage. The group was jealous of one girl who, among other things, seemed to have the most beautiful necklace. They decided to disgrace her. The girls walked down to the river and removed and hid their necklaces. When the generous-of-heart and beautiful young girl came along they told her that they had thrown their necklaces into the river as a sacrifice to the river god. When she followed suit they laughed and ran from her as they replaced their necklaces around their necks.
>
> The distraught girl began praying to the god to restore her necklace. She walked a long time along the river and finally heard a voice tell her to dive into the river, which she did without hesitation. She knew in that it must indeed be the voice of the god. At once she saw an old, ugly woman covered with open sores. The woman told her, "Lick my sores," which she did immediately with compassion. The old woman, noting her obedience, said she would protect her from the demon who devours the flesh of young maidens. The male monster appeared, smelling the young girl. But the old woman, as she had promised, hid the girl from the male monster until he finally left. The old woman then gave the girl a necklace of greater beauty than her former adornment.
>
> The old woman told her that on her way back to her village she would see a stone in her path. She was instructed to pick up the stone throw it into the water and never look back. She did as she was directed. When she arrived back at the village the other girls saw her new and beautiful necklace. They clamored to know where she had found it. When she told them she had received it from the old woman at the bottom of the river they raced off to get one for themselves. One by one they jumped into the pool and one by one they were ordered by the old woman to, "Lick my sores." They laughed at her saying they wouldn't dream of doing anything so repulsive and useless. They demanded their new necklaces. But the giant monster came and devoured the girls one by one (Luke, 1987).

This story is a symbol of the dangers, trials and achievements that become manifest at the time of the transition from girl to womanhood. The necklace is a symbol of identity and worth as a person for African women. The trick that the girls played on their peer was a product of "group-think," which is known to cover some of the worst behaviors found in humankind. This trick, too, was a transgression against the girl's personal identity. It requires great personal courage and integrity to resist the group mentality.

The naive and generous-hearted girl quickly fell into the girls' trap and threw away her personal identity. When she realized her error by gullibly identifying with her peers, she did not show anger or remorse. She immediately sought her inner voice or wisdom. When it came she did not

hesitate to go down, not upwards, to seek herself. She plunged into the unknown, trusting only herself. She came face to face with the image of womanhood which society holds in contempt. Men and women have been guilty of the contempt for feminine values and wisdom. The repulsive old woman, then, symbolizes that which we as women despise in ourselves and turn away from. The old woman's message is that we, as women, must heal (saliva is symbolically the healing water with which we are born) and cure/love ourselves. The greedy girls refused, with contempt, the essential task of womanhood, "licking the sores" of themselves and their environment. Instead they sought only the material things (beautiful necklace) money, prestige, men, and security. They refused the full spiritual experience of the transition to womanhood. They were therefore devoured (symbolic death) by the demon that assimilates such women. The male energy then takes over the female principle.

The girl who chose the spiritual path, who had the courage and humility to lick the sores received her own individual and unique necklace, not one that had been given by her family. She, throughout life will remain the guardian of her community's values, showing compassion and nurturing--the essence of the feminine nature. (Luke, 1987).

Every girl and woman must seek, for herself, a personal identity which is both separate and similar to her group. Only through discipline, respect, integrity, trusting her inner voice will she understand and live in personal nobility and feminine wisdom -- the essence of African womanhood. This, too, is a lesson of womanhood which shall be passed from mother to daughter.

The essence of African womanhood can clearly be gleaned from the events of this story. First, it is important to remember that the time of transition to womanhood is fraught with obstacles and danger. Expected and desirable outcomes include:

Womanhood Training Outcomes

*great personal courage
*integrity
*the ability to resist the group mentality
*recognize and accept responsibility for one's mistakes or errors
*refuse to wallow in anger or remorse
*seek one's inner voice or wisdom
*trusting one's inner voice
*go down, not upwards, to seek self
*plunge into the unknown, trusting self
*cherish feminine values and wisdom
*must heal cure/love ourselves--the essential task of womanhood
*correct and aid ourselves (women) and the environment.
*realize the full spiritual experience in the transition to womanhood
*resist the male demons that assimilate un- or under-developed women (devoured or symbolic death)
*match the male energy that would take over the female principle
*humility
*an individual and unique identity--not one given by her family
*prepared to be guardian of her community's values
*compassion and nurturing--the essence of the feminine nature
*a personal identity which is both separate and similar to the group
*discipline, respect, integrity
*live with personal nobility and feminine wisdom

Recommended Activities

Adults Brain storm the attributes or characteristics of a competent, cultural African woman.

Read and discuss the rites story. Discuss how these concepts can be incorporated into the lives of women and rites process for girls.

Youth Read and discuss the rites story. How many components are the girls able to draw from the lesson?

Resources

Selected Reading Materials (Reading is essential to learning and growth)

*Boone, S. A. (1986). Radiance from the waters: Ideals of feminine beauty in Mende art.
*Finch, C. S. (1991). The great mother and the origin of human culture. In Echoes of the old darkland: Themes from the African Eden.
*Garvey, A.J.(1986). The philosophy and opinions of Marcus Garvey: Or, Africa for the Africans.
*Gordon, V. V. (1987). Black women feminism and Black liberation: Which way?
*Moore, M., Gilyard, G., King-McCreary, K. & N. Warfield-Coppock. (1987) Transformation: A rites of passage manual for African American girls.
*Rodgers-Rose, L.(Ed.). (1980). The Black woman.
*Rose, P.R. (1994). In search of serenity: HIV/AIDS and the Black community.
*Uraeus: The Journal of Unconscious Life. 2 (2).
*Vanzant, I. (1992). Tapping the power within: A path to self-empowerment for Black women.
*Warfield-Coppock, N & B.A. Coppock (1992). Afrocentric theory and applications. Volume 2: Advances in the Adolescent rites of passage.

Selected Visual Arts and Music
There are several calenders (usually pulled from larger texts for the calender) produced in the last few years which have wonderful depictions of African women. "For My People" is one such example.

"I'm Every Woman," written by Chaka Khan and most recently released by Whitney Houston on the Bodyguard soundtrack the strength and multiplicity of female roles

"Yo Mista" by Patti LaBelle, written by Prince. The difficulties of being raised in a drug and sex infested environment with incompetent parenting.

Selected Movies and Videos
"Daughters of the Dust" Julia Dash
"Sarafina" stage play and movie based on the life of a South African teenage girl

Selected Media
Essence Magazine
American Visions Magazine
Sage: Journal of Black Women

Role Models
Dorothy Height
Maya Angelou
Safisha Madhubuti
Susan Taylor
Sonya Sanchez
LaFrancis Rodgers-Rose
Many, many, many women within your communities

Appendices

1.1 Self Assessment on the Spiritual Code of Conduct

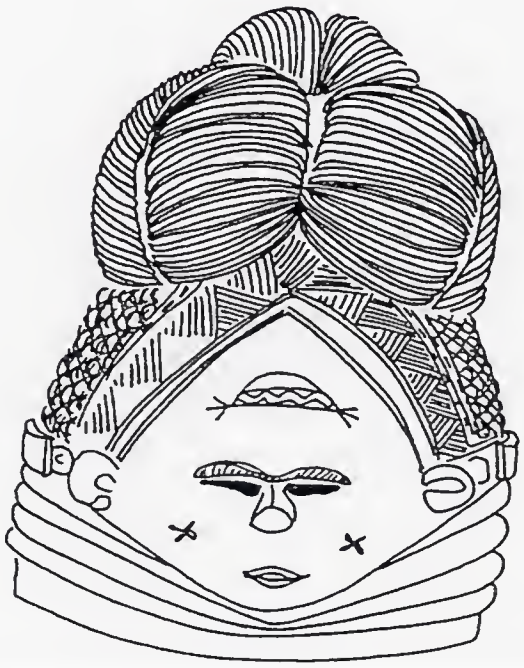
1.2 Shadow Questionnaire

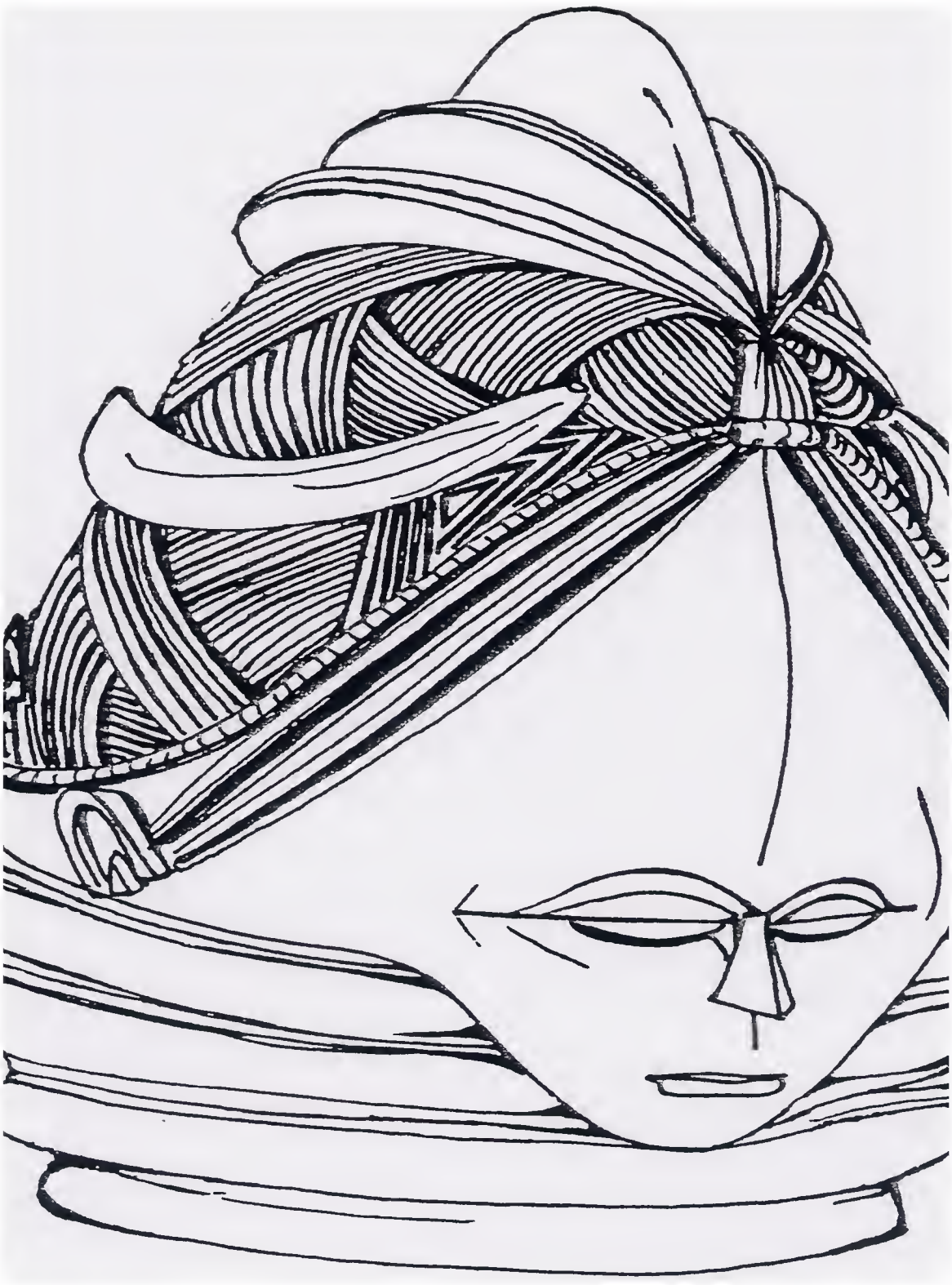
1.3 Personal Assessment of Strengths, Passages and Challenges

1.4 Group Assessment Using African Centered Principles

1.5 Assessment of Group Tasks

The Ten Virtues and Nguzo Saba





1.1 Self Assessment on the Spiritual Code of Conduct

On a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 being beginner and 7 being advanced rate yourself at the beginning of the reconnection process. Periodically (annually) review or re-rate yourself as you acquire more knowledge, information and advancement. Make notes about specific events on the back of this form.

Unconditional Love--Not to be confused with lust, love of one because they love you. Eliminates fear.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Truth--Not to be confused with what you think or know. Truth is consistent and will not harm anyone. Eliminates ego.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Willingness--The ability to give up self-centered desire and do what is in accordance with spiritual law. This act of faith eliminates feelings of limitation.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Righteousness--Not to be confused with, "I want to be right." Eliminates manipulation.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Responsibility--Not to be confused with self-sacrifice and self-denial, or actions that impress others. Eliminates blame.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discipline--Not to be confused with selfishness, or self-denial. Eliminates procrastination.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Humility--Not to be confused with being a doormat or sacrificing the self to please someone else. Eliminates feeling used.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Compassion--The ability to walk in the other persons shoes and treat them as you want to be treated. Eliminates mental and physical confusion.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Patience--Not to be confused with laziness or inactivity. Eliminates hasty action.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Speaking With a Conscious Tongue--Not to be confused with speaking your mind or saying what you feel. Eliminates negative words and energy

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Selflessness--Not to be confused with doing something to get something, or acting to get acceptance. Eliminates quest for ruthless power.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Tithing--Not to be confused with paying someone for spiritual work. Eliminates supporting unworthy spiritual source. Enacts the law of reciprocity.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1.2 Personal Assessment
Shadow Questionnaire

What: To become aware of one's own personal shadow by observing interpersonal social relationships and one's own weaknesses or negative characteristics.

Why: To actualize the concept "Know Thyself," Self is Intimacy," and "Being is Expansion."*

How: 1. List three things that really get under your skin or bug you about other people.

2. List three of your strongest fears.

3. I must admit I am weak when it comes to _____
(complete the sentence)

4. I really get angry with my child (or parents) when. . . .

5. Consider a time in the past when you took advantage of someone. This situation may range from running a little petty game on someone to situations involving sexual, political or criminal acts.

6. Reflect back to a time when you were the "sucker." How did you feel?

7. Reflect upon all the anger and hatred you might feel for someone, person or group of people. Think of all the things you dislike about them or the situation. List one or two of these things then draw all of the feelings as a big monster. Act it out. (Become the monster)

   (a) Write a letter telling them off. (Do not mail, destroy the letter)

   (b) Release that negative energy by deep-breathing slowly.

   (c) Visually see the energy actually leaving your body.

   (d) Forgive them in your heart, and mentally.

   (e) Use light and love.

   (f) Visualize the happy and perfect situation.

8. How do you feel about being Black?

9. How do I feel about other Black people?

10. Do I consider kinky hair to be bad hair?

11. Do I think I look better than most Blacks?

12. How do I feel about my African heritage?

13. Do I consider myself of African heritage?

14. Do I feel kinship with Blacks in other parts of the World? Explain.

15. When I have an occasion to live in or visit a country (state, city, neighborhood) other than the one I was born in, how do I feel about the indigenous Black people? They are: (a) superior, (b) inferior, (c) equal or, (d) other.

16. By drawing, respond to the words, Nigger, Nigger, Nigger!

17. In poetic form express your feelings about:

    (a) Black fatherhood
    (b) Black motherhood
    (c) Black childhood

Draw a picture of a,b, and c above. Repeat drawings using red, yellow or white people.

Assessment 1.3 Personal Assessment of Strengths, Passages and Challenges

Area	Event(s)	Lesson(s)	Growth Needs
educational			
career			
marriage			
conflicts			
parenthood independence of children			
family harmony			
managing death/separation			
painful events			
illness/diseases			
eldership			
spiritual passage			
other_____			

Every significant thing that happens to us throughout our life is an opportunity for learning. In particular, painful events are the greatest opportunity for evaluating one's beliefs, attitudes, behavior, relationships, images (may include dreams), and direction. This worksheet can be used as a guide to keep notes on accomplishments and areas where you need additional growth. Recall and record some of the significant events of your life. Analyze them for lessons and share some of them with others to get a new perspective on your beliefs, etc.

1.4
Group Assessment Using African Centered Principles

Assess your group's proficiency in applying African centered and collective principles of organizing. Rate the group individually, then discuss your rating in the group and assess where improvements can be made. On a scale of 1 to 7 with one being beginner and 7 being advanced. Date the form and write recommended actions on the back. Review progress and re-assess on an annual basis.

(1) Exhibiting **Unity of Spirit**--the sense of unity is invisible but members are characterized as cells in a body--the group needs the individual and the individual needs the group.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(2) Exhibiting **Trust**--everyone is moved to trust all other members of the group in an inclusive way. It is further assumed that everyone is inherently well-intentioned.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(3) Exhibiting **Openness**--being open to the other members requires trust. Individual problems are taken on as community problems, so each person is open to others.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(4) Exhibiting **Loving and Caring**--what one has belongs to the collective in the sense that not sharing diminishes the group to the enhancement of the individual.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(5) Exhibiting **Respect for the Elders**--the elders represent the collective memory of the group. They are responsible for keeping the group together, initiating the young, prescribing appropriate rituals and monitoring the group's dynamics.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(6) Showing **Respect for Nature**--wisdom is learned from observing nature; it is also where medicine is located.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(7) Using the **Circle of the Ancestors**--those who have passed on are not considered dead or unavailable. The community of the spirits become a guide or inspiration to those living.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Notes:

1.5 Assessment of Group Tasks

Group Name_____

Organizing Date_____

Founding Members_____

_____

This form is included to assist in the many tasks that must be accomplished in the course of establishing one's group/collective. The following is a components can be used as a guidelines in group development. The best way to work with these objectives is to set aside a time when the whole group can come together to work on the formation in a cooperative manner.

Mission Statement--collective state the group's mission

Goals/Objectives--a set of larger goals with several objectives to cover the breath of the area needed in the group's development (Use the following format):

Goal One

Objective 1.1

Objective 1.2

Objective 1.3

Process Rules--develop guidelines for interactions between members.

Leadership--select persons who have time, commitment and people skills.

Group Cohesion--assess your group's bonding progress over time.

Managing Conflict--set forth guidelines to handle individual conflicts forth right.

Task Completion--set guidelines, realistic timetables, and reporting requirements.

Responsibilities--(individ. & sub-group)--assign tasks to individuals and small groups.

Spiritual Passage--assess the group's growth along spiritual and values characteristics.

Areas of Expertise--all members should list their expertise and interests.

The Ten Virtues (From Ancient Kemet)

Wisdom: Control of one's thoughts.

Temperance: Control of one's actions.

Steadfastness: Devotion to purpose.

Fidelity: Faith in the ability of one's master teacher to teach the truth (master is used here in the sense of:
(1) one's own inner master or Holy Guardian Angel and,
(2) the teacher actually instructing the class, i.e. Dr. Ligon, Dr. King, etc.

Prudence: Faith in one's ability to assimilate the truth.

Fidelity and Readiness to Learn: Faith in one's own ability to yield the truth.

Fortitude: Be free from resentment under the experience of persecution.

Courage: Be free of resentment under the experience of wrong.

Justice and Righteousness: Cultivated ability to distinguish between right and wrong.

Sense of Values: Cultivated ability to distinguish between the real and unreal.

Source: Somadhi, S. (1981). Facing the shadow. Uraeus: The journal of unconscious life, 2 (2), p. 16.

Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles) (Contemporary Value System)

UMOJA (Unity) "To strive for a principled and harmonious togetherness in the family, community, nation and world African community."

KUJICHAGULIA (SELF-DETERMINATION) "To define ourselves, name ourselves, created for ourselves, and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named, created for and spoken for by others."

UJIMA (COLLECTIVE WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY) "To build and maintain our community together and make our sisters' and brothers' problems our problems and to solve them together."

UJAMAA (COOPERATIVE ECONOMICS) "To build our own businesses, control the economics of our own community and share in all its work and wealth."

NIA (PURPOSE) "To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness".

KUUMBA (CREATIVITY) "To do always as much as we can in the way we can in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial then when we inherited it."

IMANI (FAITH) "To believe with all our heart in our Creator, our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle."

Source: Karenga, M. (1989) The African American holiday of Kwanzaa: A celebration of family, community and culture. Los Angeles, CA: University of Sankore Press. pp. 47-70.

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About the Author

Nsenga Warfield-Coppock, Ph.D. has been an innovator and leader in the rites of passage movement for several years providing oral and written resources, unique African centered curricula, materials, trainings, evaluations, and consultations. She is an accomplished trainer, writer and sought-after speaker. Dr. Warfield is a foremost acknowledged expert in female rites of passage. As an organizational psychologist in Washington, D.C., President of Baobab Associates, Inc. she has worked with more than 100 rites of passage groups and organizations around the country. She has chaired several national rites of passage conferences with national rites organizations. Dr. Warfield-Coppock has received fellowships, grants, community acknowledgements, awards and citations including the Washington D.C. UNIA's African Heritage Community Service Award, the International Black Women's Congress ONI Award, service awards from Washington, D.C.'s Mayor, The Association of Black Psychologists and the Detroit Urban League's Female Empowerment Program. She is listed in The World Who's Who of Women, Who's Who Among Black Americans, and Outstanding Young Women of America.

Dr. Warfield is author, co-author, or editor of more than 20 books, journal or newspaper articles, monographs or book chapters on the subject of Rites of Passage. Her other scholarly writings have appeared in, Black Books Bulletin, The Journal of Black Psychology, The Journal of Negro Education, Reflections on Black Psychology, a chapters for Black Family Life: A Curriculum for Effective Intervention and Support to the African American Family," Too Much Schooling, Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Societies, a national HIV/STD Technical Assistance Training Manual, Advances in Black Psychology, and Tests and Measurements on Black Populations, Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Symposium—"Fostering Spiritual Growth Among At-Risk Youth: Multi-Cultural Perspectives," Proceedings, and the revised, edited Black Women.

She is a founding member of the New York based Sojourner Truth Adolescent Rites Society, (STARS) Inc.and certified trainer of Rites of Passage organizations across the country. Sister Nsenga was initiation in 1989 and is a founding member of ANKOBIA, an organization of Afrikan men and women, which provides the rites for Afrikans of all ages. As a member of the ANKOBIA Education Ministry, she has provided training for adolescent initiates in the area of African womanhood, femininity and personal identity. She has been married for twenty five years and is the mother of three children (two girls who completed their rites in 1986 and 1991). She serves as a junior elder and member of the Membership and Protocol Committee in the Banneker City (Washington, D.C.) Council of Elders, a community-based and spiritually-regulated African centered body, mandated by national elder Dr. John Henrik Clark.

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